



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 1 FEB 2023



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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	02/01 Russia focuses on eastern Ukraine
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-donetsk-moscow-4b87170d155cddb69849e3100049454e">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-donetsk-moscow-4b87170d155cddb69849e3100049454e</a>

## GIST

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia is mustering its military might in the Luhansk region of Ukraine, local officials said Wednesday, in what Kyiv suspects is preparation for an offensive in the eastern area in coming weeks as the anniversary of Moscow's invasion approaches.

The Kremlin's forces are expelling local residents from their homes near the Russian-held parts of the front line so that they can't provide information about Russian troop deployments to Ukrainian artillery, Luhansk Gov. Serhii Haidai said.

"There is an active transfer of (Russian troops) to the region and they are definitely preparing for something on the eastern front in February," Haidai said.

Military analysts anticipate a new push soon by Moscow's forces, with the Institute for the Study of War saying in an assessment late Tuesday that "an imminent Russian offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action."

A new offensive might also coincide with the invasion anniversary on Feb. 24.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported Wednesday that Russia is also concentrating its efforts in neighboring Donetsk province, especially in its bid to capture the key city of Bakhmut.

Donetsk and Luhansk provinces make up the Donbas, an industrial region bordering Russia that President Vladimir Putin identified as a goal from the war's outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian authorities since 2014.

The regional governor of Donetsk, Pavlo Kyrylenko, posted images of the aftermath of the shelling in Bakhmut, showing huge black holes in residential buildings in the embattled city.

He said that Russia is "actively deploying new military personnel to the region."

Donetsk was one of four provinces that Russia illegally annexed in the fall, but it controls only about half of it. To take the remaining half, Russian forces have no choice but to go through Bakhmut, which offers the only approach to bigger Ukrainian-held cities.

Russian forces have been trying for months to capture Bakhmut. Moscow-installed authorities in Donetsk claimed Russian troops are "closing the ring" around the city.

Russian shelling of Bakhmut, where most residents have fled and others spend much of their time in cellars, killed at least five civilians and wounded 10 others on Tuesday, Ukraine's presidential office said Wednesday.

Ukraine is keen to secure more Western military aid as it tries to fend off the much larger Russian forces. It has already won pledges of tanks and now wants more.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, tweeted Wednesday that talks are underway on securing longer-range missiles and fighter jets from Ukraine's allies.

Asked to comment on media reports about a new package of U.S. military assistance to Ukraine expected to be announced soon, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described it as "a direct path to inciting tensions and taking the escalation to a new level."

"It will require additional efforts on our part, but it won't change the course of events," he said in a conference call with reporters.

The Western allies are trying to broaden their coalition in support of Ukraine.

	NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday in Tokyo that he sought stronger cooperation and more “friends” for the alliance in the Indo-Pacific region.
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 China cities struggle; ‘hidden debts’ soar</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/31/economy/china-local-governments-basic-services-debt-crisis-intl-hnk/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/31/economy/china-local-governments-basic-services-debt-crisis-intl-hnk/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>Hong Kong CNN</b> — Three years of <a href="#">strict pandemic controls</a> in China and a real estate crash have drained local government coffers, leaving authorities across the country struggling with mountains of debt. The problem has gotten so extreme that some cities are now unable to provide basic services, and the risk of default is rising.</p> <p>Analysts estimate China’s outstanding government debts surpassed 123 trillion yuan (\$18 trillion) last year, of which nearly \$10 trillion is so-called “hidden debt” owed by risky local government financing platforms that are backed by cities or provinces.</p> <p>As the financial pressure has mounted, regional governments have reportedly been slashing wages, cutting transportation services and reducing fuel subsidies in the middle of a harsh winter.</p> <p>Thousands of people in the northern province of Hebei had trouble heating their homes in November and December because of a shortage of natural gas, according to multiple <a href="#">Chinese media reports</a>. Cuts in government subsidies were partly to blame, according to state-owned news site <a href="#">Jiemian</a>.</p> <p>In January, in the northernmost province of Heilongjiang, households in the city of Hegang were also <a href="#">left without heat</a> after local firms severely restricted supply. The companies blamed the move on a lack of government subsidies.</p> <p>The lack of heating in the dead of winter has led to <a href="#">widespread complaints</a> on social media. The central government in Beijing responded by ordering cities to provide adequate heating, but without specifying who will pay the bills.</p> <p>Local governments have <a href="#">exhausted their budgets</a> after spending enormous amounts of money on enforcing frequent Covid lockdowns, mass testing and setting up quarantine centers before <a href="#">December’s policy U-turn</a>, which signaled the abrupt end of Xi Jinping’s zero-Covid policy.</p> <p>“Beijing is facing an economic minefield of its own making,” said Craig Singleton, senior fellow for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington. “All told, China’s current debt crisis represents a perfect storm.”</p> <p><b>Massive bills</b></p> <p>It’s not yet clear how much the country has spent in total on fighting the pandemic. But one province, Guangdong, <a href="#">revealed</a> that it had spent \$22 billion on eliminating Covid over the three years beginning 2020.</p> <p>Revenue, meanwhile, contracted sharply over the same period. Rolling lockdowns seriously dented household incomes, leading many to reduce spending, which in turn resulted in less tax revenue for local governments. Huge tax breaks to support businesses through the pandemic also reduced government income.</p> <p>Further complicating matters is the housing market slump; home prices have been falling for 16 straight months. Land sales, which typically account for more than 40% of local government revenue, <a href="#">have collapsed</a>.</p> <p>Last year, a number of cities suspended bus services due to budget constraints, including Leiyang in Hunan province and Yangjiang in Guangdong, according to operators’ announcements.</p>

Separately, Hegang, the city in Heilongjiang province, made history in early 2022 by becoming the first to be forced to undergo a fiscal restructuring due to grave debt distress, according to [state media reports](#).

As a result, it must cut spending on infrastructure projects, reduce government subsidies to industries, stop hiring new staff and sell assets, according to [rules](#) published by the State Council.

Public sector jobs, considered the most secure in the country, were also affected elsewhere. In June, several wealthy eastern provinces — including Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangsu — slashed pay by as much as 30%, according to Chinese news website Caixin.

“China’s runaway local debt poses a serious threat to the country’s overall economic health and will weigh heavily on China’s still-nascent recovery,” said Singleton.

The debt inhibits the government’s ability to spur growth and stabilize employment, as well as maintain or expand public services, he said.

“No doubt, China’s current debt crisis has the potential to exacerbate existing socio-economic tensions,” Singleton said, adding that renewed public protests [like those in late 2022](#) could emerge, as Chinese citizens come to terms with [“vanishing jobs, closed businesses](#) and reduced wages.”

### **‘Hidden debt’**

China’s local government debt had already been rising [dramatically](#) for a decade before the pandemic, largely the result of a state-led investment boom in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. But the situation has deteriorated rapidly in the last three years.

Last year, local government debt jumped 15% to 35 trillion yuan (\$5.2 trillion), according to data released by the Ministry of Finance on Sunday. Interest payments on local government bonds exceeded one trillion yuan (\$148 billion) for the first time in history, according to [state media](#).

Debt that is backed by local governments but which doesn’t show up on their balance sheets could be much bigger.

The “hidden debt” issued by local government financial vehicles, entities created by local governments to circumvent borrowing restrictions and used to channel funding for infrastructure spending, might have totaled 65 trillion yuan (\$9.6 trillion) by the middle of 2022, according to a recent estimate by analysts at Mars Macro, an economic research firm based in Hunan.

That’s more than 20% higher than the estimate of 53 trillion yuan made by Goldman Sachs in 2021. That would be equivalent to more than half of China’s GDP. Overall, Chinese government debt is now equivalent to 102% of its GDP, the analysts estimated.

That debt ratio is still lower [than America’s](#), which is currently [about 122%](#), based on its national debt and GDP in 2022, but China’s has grown at a staggering rate, more than doubling from 47% in 2016.

### **Financial risks**

There are already signs local governments are having trouble repaying their liabilities.

In early January, a troubled government-owned company in the southwestern province of Guizhou responsible for building infrastructure projects announced that its lenders had given it an extra 20 years to repay loans worth \$2.3 billion. Loan rollovers with a such a long time frame are extremely rare in China.

Analysts said the case signals that local governments are under severe financial pressure this year. Their debt squeeze could pose a serious threat to China’s financial system, particularly to small regional banks.

“Once defaults begin, suggesting that government guarantees have broken down among LGFVs [local government financing vehicles], defaults can snowball quickly,” Allen Feng and Logan Wright, China analysts at Rhodium Group, wrote in a research report last week.

“As a result, there is a significant risk of financial contagion,” they said. “Smaller city and rural commercial banks are particularly vulnerable because of their deep relationship with local governments.”

Even the country’s top officials have admitted that one of the biggest threats to financial stability in 2023 is hidden local government debt, which is opaque, huge and hard to track.

### Dilemma

The central government in Beijing has signaled it’s not coming to the rescue.

“If it’s your baby, you should hold it yourself,” the Ministry of Finance warned in a statement earlier this month aimed at local authorities. “The central government won’t bail [you] out.”

But Beijing may have to allow provinces and cities to borrow more.

China’s economy is in a severe downturn. GDP [grew only 3%](#) last year, the second worst growth in 46 years.

The government had previously resorted to the old playbook of encouraging local governments to borrow more money to fund infrastructure projects to boost growth. In December, an infrastructure push [helped boost economic activity, leading to signs of growth stabilization](#).

In January, [Bloomberg](#) reported that Chinese authorities were considering a record quota for special local government bonds this year.

“So far, it seems that Xi badly needs a fast recovery of the economy, and has chosen to shelve the debt problem for later,” said Adam Liu, an assistant professor at the National University of Singapore.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Dangerous ice storm, travel chaos
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/deadly-ice-storm-rages-texas-causing-travel-chaos-outages-rcna68531">https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/deadly-ice-storm-rages-texas-causing-travel-chaos-outages-rcna68531</a>
GIST	<p>A severe <a href="#">ice storm</a> continues to sweep across parts of the South, causing chaos on roads that has been blamed for at least three deaths, along with flight cancellations and widespread power outages.</p> <p>The "long-duration" winter storm that has brought dangerous sleet and freezing rain from Texas to Tennessee is expected to continue through at least early Thursday, the National Weather Service said.</p> <p>As of early Wednesday morning, at least three deaths had been connected to the storm.</p> <p>On Monday, a 45-year-old man was ejected from the 1997 Toyota 4Runner he was driving after he apparently lost control on an ice-covered overpass in Arlington, Texas, police said. He died at a hospital.</p> <p>That evening, a 49-year-old woman died after the 1997 Chevrolet Silverado she was driving struck a tree near Eldorado, Texas, according to the Texas Department of Public Safety. The woman, identified as Sherry Lynn Taylor, lost control of the truck on icy roads and skidded, the department said.</p> <p>In Austin, another person died after a weather-related multiple vehicle collision, according to Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services.</p>

### **Dangerous roads and flight cancellations**

The storm has caused widespread travel chaos both on the roads and at airports this week.

Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott urged residents to avoid the roads due to the hazardous icing, adding that about 1,600 roads in the state had been affected.

"Because of the icing, many roads in Texas will remain very dangerous for the next 24 to 48 hours," he said. "Be cautious, especially for things like black ice."

The National Weather Service in Fort Worth warned that light to moderate freezing rain moving into central Texas counties early Wednesday morning would "freeze on contact when it lands and accumulate ice on ALL surfaces!"

"Already slick roads will become even more slick & very dangerous tonight and tomorrow!" it said in a [tweet](#).

The severe weather has also contributed to thousands of flight cancellations and delays so far this week.

As of early Wednesday, at least 1,300 flights within, into and out of the United States were canceled, according to online flight tracker [FlightAware](#). At least 355 of those flight cancellations were at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, while nearly 160 were at Dallas Love Field and just under 110 were listed at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

[Southwest Airlines](#) and [American Airlines](#), national carriers both based in the region, made up the majority of the cancellations, with Southwest seeing 487 flights canceled as of early Wednesday and American listing 434 cancellations, according to FlightAware.

### **Sweeping power outages**

Residents across Texas have also faced power outages in the midst of the storm.

Nearly 120,000 utility customers were without power as of early Wednesday morning, according to online outage tracker [PowerOutage.us](#).

Speaking at the news conference on Tuesday, utility officials said the state's electrical grid and natural gas supply was ready and would remain reliable over the course of the severe weather event.

Public Utility Commission Chairman Peter Lake told Texans to contact their local power providers if winter weather and icing conditions caused local power outages.

### **Severe weather to continue**

Abbott said Texans in the north, west and central regions of the state should prepare for continued severe weather through Thursday.

He said parts of Texas could even get flash flooding Wednesday and Thursday.

More icy conditions were expected Wednesday from Texas through a majority of the Mid-South, the National Weather Service said. Additional ice accumulations up to a half inch were forecast for much of central and north-central Texas, as well as for parts of southern Arkansas, it said.

"A quarter inch of ice accretion is possible across a larger area that includes southern Oklahoma, most of Arkansas, and into far western Tennessee," it added, warning that this amount of ice accretion on top of what has already fallen could lead to more "treacherous travel," along with the possibility of tree damage and power outages.



	Ice Storm Warnings, Winter Storm Warnings, and Winter Weather Advisories are in effect for hard-hit areas and residents have been urged to check road conditions before traveling and to drive with extreme caution, it said.
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Workers face 'layoff survivor guilt'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/layoff-survivor-guilt-tech-layoffs/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/layoff-survivor-guilt-tech-layoffs/</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Mass layoffs</a> like those roiling the tech industry affect more than the people who lose their jobs.</p> <p>Laid-off workers face practical challenges, such as staying financially afloat and securing new employment, as well as tough emotions, like feeling rejected. Meanwhile, those who remain after their colleagues are dismissed suffer from "survivor layoff guilt," according to workplace psychologists and layoff survivors themselves.</p> <p>Susan Tyson, a marketing professional at a Texas-based software company, experienced this firsthand when her employer cut 25 of her roughly 7,000 colleagues last month. She was initially relieved that she wasn't among those who lost their jobs. Then the regret started to sink in.</p> <p>"My first thought was, 'Yippee, it's not me!' And my second thought was feeling very guilty that others lost their jobs and I didn't," Tyson told CBS MoneyWatch. "Many of the people that I worked with were let go and you just feel bad whenever that happens."</p> <p><b>When fear kicks in</b></p> <p>Generally, survivor guilt sets in when some people, often arbitrarily, survive a traumatic event like combat, a natural disaster or job layoffs, while others are not as lucky.</p> <p>In the workplace it can trigger anger, fear and anxiety among surviving employees, according to David Noer, a career consultant and author of "Healing The Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations."</p> <p>In his experience, "people who survive layoffs tend to be less productive, more suspicious, more fearful and get less work done than was anticipated."</p> <p><b>"I feel like I am on a short list"</b></p> <p>Some workers, like Tyson, wonder why they were spared and fear that they could lose their own jobs in a future round of cuts.</p> <p>"I will be honest, I feel like I am on a short list and there are more cuts coming," she said. "I don't know what the logic of the layoffs was. I don't understand it."</p> <p>Indeed, when employers aren't transparent about why some workers were laid off and others weren't, it can trigger deep feelings of insecurity.</p> <p>"Employees who stay at a company after layoffs often feel anxiety around the future of the company," said Kathryn Minshew, founder and CEO of The Muse, a career development platform. "It can be hard because most employers can't or won't comment on why certain people were chosen for layoffs and others weren't."</p> <p>"It may be related to budgets and company priorities, or performance. Or it could be somewhat random, and that ambiguity and lack of concrete information can be scary to people," she added.</p> <p>And in the era of remote work, employees sometimes don't even know which of their colleagues were cut.</p> <p>"Sometimes you don't even know who was let go until you send them an email and get an autoresponder back," career transition coach Catherine Morgan told CBS MoneyWatch.</p>

### Psychological "tsunami effects"

Wrestling with these complex emotions can erode layoff survivors' trust in a company and, in turn, affect their productivity and performance on the job.

"It creates a lot of paranoia and because of that, you get a lot of distrust within an organization with these large-scale layoffs," said workplace mental health expert Sally Spencer-Thomas. "Workers will question if the organization has their well-being at heart or if they are only looking at profit-making. So there are a lot of psychological tsunami effects that happen after a mass layoff."

Companies that proactively prepare their workforce for layoffs generally have better outcomes. Steps that can reassure staffers include communicating the reason for the layoffs and providing information about the company's future. Leaders who "deal in feelings and emotions" and host "grieving and venting sessions" can keep workers' confidence in a company intact, according to Noer.

"That's what gets divested in a transition like that. So taking action, steps to rebuild that trust, is essential," Spencer-Thomas said.

For layoff survivors, reaching out to former colleagues can go a long way toward making both parties feel better. "It's important to keep in touch with people who have left. They need support as much as the people left behind. It feels good to know colleagues cared about you and want to stay friends with outgo, because that feeling of being booted out is so painful," she added.

It can help mitigate feelings of guilt for having been spared one's job, too, Minshew said.

"One of the most powerful things someone can do to cope with layoff survivor guilt is to actively reach out to and connect with and help those people at your company who were affected," she said. "You can be a powerful asset to their job search by introducing them to other contacts and companies, offering to serve as a positive reference or be helpful in reviewing their resume or LinkedIn profile."

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HEADLINE	01/31 White officer belated suspension: questions
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/31/tyre-nichols-death-white-officer-preston-hemphill">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/31/tyre-nichols-death-white-officer-preston-hemphill</a>
GIST	<p>Questions have been raised over why Memphis police waited weeks to name a white police officer involved in the beating death of <a href="#">Tyre Nichols</a>, as it emerged an unnamed seventh officer and three emergency responders have also been disciplined over the case.</p> <p>Major Karen Rudolph of <a href="#">Memphis</a> police announced on Monday that the white officer in question, Preston Hemphill, was placed on desk duty on 8 January, a day after Nichols – who is Black – was beaten by police and two days before he died.</p> <p>Police had named and <a href="#">fired</a> five Black officers on 20 January – all of whom have since been charged with murder over Nichols's death – but waited to reveal Hemphill's identity.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the civil rights attorney representing Nichols's family, Ben Crump, said video footage from the beating shows Hemphill pulling Nichols from his car before shocking the 29-year-old with a Taser stun gun.</p> <p>A copy of a police report written hours after Nichols's beating mentions that Hemphill used a stun gun on Nichols. A photo of the police report first appeared on social media after being posted by the Memphis talkshow host Thaddeus Matthews, who is known as the the Cussing Pastor and said a source had provided it to him. The district attorney, Steven Mulroy, reportedly told the <a href="#">New York Times</a> on Monday that his office had a police report the same as the one contained in the photograph posted by Matthews.</p>



While video footage verifies the report's description of Hemphill's using a stun gun on Nichols, the document omits mention of the kicks and punches that officers unleashed on Nichols, the Times article added.

Neither Memphis police nor Mulroy's office responded on Tuesday to requests for comment about the report, which sought to portray Nichols as violent and combative despite videos of his killing demonstrating nothing remotely close to that and instead contained horrifying images of him calling out for help from his mother.

According to Crump, the footage – including from officer body cameras – also captures Hemphill saying of colleagues at the scene: “I hope they stomp his ass.”

Crump criticized Memphis police for waiting to name Hemphill, who has not yet been fired or charged with a crime.

“Why is his identity and the role he played in Tyre's death just now coming to light?” Crump said in a statement.

“We have asked from the beginning that the Memphis police department be transparent with the family and the community – this news seems to indicate that they haven't risen to the occasion.

“It certainly begs the question why the white officer involved in this brutal attack was shielded and protected from the public eye, and to date, from sufficient discipline and accountability.”

In a statement on Monday, Rudolph said Hemphill and another unnamed officer were relieved of duty on 8 January while police investigated Nichols's beating.

“Officer Preston Hemphill and the other officer's actions and inactions have been and continue to be the subject of this investigation,” Rudolph said.

Rudolph said the internal investigation had initially focused on the five officers who were at the “second scene” where Nichols was assaulted. Nichols had fled from a traffic stop after being dragged from his car at that initial scene.

Hemphill was the third officer at the traffic stop that preceded the violent arrest but was not at the scene where Nichols was beaten, his lawyer Lee Gerald has said.

The new information came as fire department officials announced the firing of the emergency medical technicians Robert Long and JaMicheal Sandridge and Lt Michelle Whitaker in connection with Nichols's death.

The fire chief, Gina Sweat, said in a statement that the department had received a call from police to respond to a report of a person who had been pepper-sprayed, and the workers arrived as Nichols was handcuffed and leaning up against a squad car.

Long and Sandridge, based on the nature of the call and information police gave them, “failed to conduct an adequate patient assessment of Mr Nichols”, the statement said. Whitaker and the driver remained in the vehicle.

An investigation determined that all three had violated “multiple” policies and protocols, the statement said.

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/01/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-343-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/01/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-343-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The US is readying more than \$2bn worth of military aid for Ukraine</b> that is expected to include longer-range rockets for the first time as well as other munitions and weapons, two US officials briefed on the matter told Reuters.</li> <li>• <b>Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the Ukrainian president, said he was not finished shuffling the ranks of senior officials</b> and that anyone failing to perform according to strict standards faced dismissal.</li> <li>• <b>Some western allies appear to have cooled on the idea of supplying F-16 and other fighter jets to Ukraine over the past 24 hours.</b> Joe Biden, the US president, when asked at the White House late on Monday if his country would provide F-16s, <a href="#">answered simply “no”</a>, although he emphasised on Tuesday morning he would remain in discussions with Ukraine about its weapons requests.</li> <li>• <b>The UK also said supplying western jets was not practical.</b> “These are sophisticated pieces of equipment,” a Downing St spokesperson said. “We do not think it is practical to send those jets into Ukraine.” They added that prime minister <a href="#">Rishi Sunak supported accelerating support</a> for Ukraine after completing a review that a “prolonged stalemate” in the conflict would benefit Russia.</li> <li>• <b>Zelenskiy’s most senior adviser suggested on Monday that Poland is willing to supply Ukraine with the F-16 fighters.</b> Andriy Yermak said <a href="#">Ukraine had received “positive signals” from Warsaw</a>, although Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, was careful to stress his own country would only act in consultation with Nato allies.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine has said it will continue lobbying, arguing that the west had repeatedly said no to supplying weapons such as tanks before relenting over time.</b> Oleksii Reznikov, the defence minister, said on a visit to Paris: “All types of assistance at the beginning went through the no stage. This means no as of today.”</li> <li>• <b>Reznikov’s French counterpart, Sébastien Lecornu, reiterated there was “no taboo” on the supply of jets,</b> echoing similar remarks made by Emmanuel Macron on Monday evening. France also said it would donate 12 Caesar howitzers to Ukraine after the summit between the two ministers. Lecornu said the pair <a href="#">discussed training Ukrainian pilots to fly French fighter jets</a> but that no decision had yet been taken.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine expects to receive 120-140 tanks in a “first wave” of deliveries from a coalition of 12 countries, the foreign minister has said.</b> Dmytro Kuleba added that <a href="#">the first tranche</a> would include the German Leopard 2, the British Challenger 2 and the US M1 Abrams tanks, and that Ukraine was also “really counting” on supplies of French Leclerc tanks being agreed. The <a href="#">number of heavy tanks publicly pledged</a> to Ukraine appears to be well short of the 321 that Vadym Omelchenko, Ukraine’s ambassador to France, stated last week.</li> <li>• <b>Russian forces are preparing for a renewed attack on Ukraine imminently, most likely in the coming months,</b> according to analysts. Citing western, Ukrainian and Russian sources, the US thinktank the Institute for the Study of War said <a href="#">Moscow was “preparing for an imminent offensive”</a>, pointing to remarks by the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, who said there were “no signs” that Vladimir Putin was “preparing for peace”.</li> <li>• <b>Russian forces continued attacks on positions across the frontline near the eastern cities of Bakhmut and Donetsk.</b> Moscow’s troops have been pounding Bakhmut in the Donbas for several months, but in recent days the invaders appeared to have opened up a new effort to gain ground around the village of Vuhledar, 30 miles south-west of Donetsk city. The situation in Bakhmut and Vuhledar was “very tough”, with both areas and other parts of the Donetsk region “under constant Russian attacks”, Zelenskiy said.</li> <li>• <b>Russian troops have probably developed “probing attacks” around the towns of Pavlivka and Vuhledar into a more “concerted” assault,</b> the UK’s Ministry of Defence said in an <a href="#">intelligence update</a>. “Russian commanders are likely aiming to develop a new axis of advance into Ukrainian-held Donetsk oblast, and to divert Ukrainian forces from the heavily contested Bakhmut sector. There is a realistic possibility that Russia will continue to make local gains in the sector.”</li> <li>• <b>The Belarus president, Alexander Lukashenko, has said his country is “already ready” to offer more assistance to Russia in its war against Ukraine.</b> Speaking during a state visit to Zimbabwe, a fellow ally of Russia, Lukashenko <a href="#">did not specify</a> what that help would entail. It</li> </ul>

	<p>comes as Belarus and Russia are <a href="#">conducting a week-long session</a> of training for the joint command of their regional grouping of forces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Military casualties on both sides in the war have totalled about 200,000, a western official has said</b>, with a similar number killed and wounded on either side. <a href="#">A higher proportion of Russians had been killed</a>, the official added, because they have been on the offensive, meaning that “they’ve suffered more fatalities than the Ukrainians on balance”.</li> <li>• <b>The US has accused Russia of not complying with its obligation under a nuclear arms control treaty by not allowing inspectors to visit its nuclear weapons sites.</b> Russia’s “refusal” to allow inspections <a href="#">under the New Start treaty</a> “prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the treaty and threatens the viability of US-Russian nuclear arms control”, a US state department spokesperson said.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Private Belgium arms dealer hopeful</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/ukraine-europe-tanks-belgian-buyer-oip">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/ukraine-europe-tanks-belgian-buyer-oip</a>
GIST	<p>On the outskirts of Tournai, a sleepy medieval town in the gentle, Brueghelian landscape of the French-speaking part of Belgium, there is an unassuming grey hangar, barely hidden behind a fence. Inside are rows upon rows of German-made Leopard 1 tanks and other heavy fighting vehicles – some of the same types of weapons that top Ukraine’s military wishlist.</p> <p>The hangar belongs to the Belgium defence company OIP and contains one of the biggest privately owned reserves of weapons in Europe. “Many of these tanks have been sitting here for years. Hopefully, now it is the time they finally see some action in Ukraine,” said Freddy Versluys, the head of OIP, as he toured the hangar.</p> <p>“Here we have the 50 Leopard 1s,” he said, pointing. “We also have 38 German Gepard tanks, 112 Austrian SK-105 light tanks, and 100 Italian VCC2 and 70 M113 armour carriers.”</p> <p>In total, his firm has about 500 armoured vehicles in stock, “probably the widest private arsenal of tanks in Europe,” according to Versluys, who has a long history in the military sector.</p> <p>After completing his military service, Versluys spent nine years working for the Belgian army in a division that was responsible for the quality control of tanks and ammunition. In 1989 he joined OIP, a firm that specialised in optical equipment, where he eventually set up OIP Land Systems, a subsidiary company that bought up old military equipment, banking that one day there would be a demand for it again.</p> <p>“Everything we do is legal here, we go by the books and have all the licences needed,” he said, shrugging at the “arms dealer” label.</p> <p>Walking Tournai’s narrow, cobblestoned back streets and boulevards, it is hard to imagine that such weapons are only a 15-minute walk away. Versluys bought up most of his current stock over the last two decades, acquiring the tanks directly from European governments cutting their defence spending.</p> <p>Since the fall of the Soviet Union, European nations have sought to replace some of the heavy and costly-to-maintain cold war-era tanks with the lighter vehicles needed for shorter peacekeeping missions around the world. The defence cuts were accelerated by the 2008 economic crisis, and by 2014, the year Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea, European military spending had reached a historic low.</p> <p>In one of Versluys’s bigger deals, he bought 50 Leopard 1 tanks that the Belgian government decommissioned in 2014 for €37,000 each (about £29,600). “It was the market price because of the geopolitical situation at the time,” he said. “But buying those decommissioned tanks was a massive gamble for us. A big, big risk.”</p>

The Leopard 1, which is from the 1960s, is lighter and less powerful than the newer Leopard 2 tanks, 14 of which Germany agreed last week to send to Ukraine, but German officials have said they would still be able to compete with a Russian battle tank.

For years, Versluys was unable to sell the Leopard 1s and Gepards as German law requires approval from Berlin for the re-export of its military equipment. But the chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision last week on the Leopard 2s, which opened the floodgates for other European countries to follow suit, has opened up new possibilities.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the subsequent unprecedented western military support to Kyiv, had already led Versluys to sell 46 M113 light armoured vehicles to the UK, which then transferred them to Ukraine as part of a military package. Belgium, which has no tanks left in its defence stock, has explored the possibility of buying back the Leopard 1s it sold to Versluys.

Ludvine Dedonder, Belgium's minister of defence, last week said it had opened talks with OIP but accused the firm of trying to make a "huge profit" from the sale. "The talks are still on, but I'm not going to pay half a million for a tank that's nowhere near combat-ready," Dedonder told Belgian media.

Versluys denied that the Belgian government had approached him, and said it was hard to estimate the price for which he would sell the tanks. "There is no point talking about prices right now because we need to check the condition of each tank and what needs to be updated," he said.

He stressed that it could take months and up to €1m in renovation costs for each tank to get them ready for use in Ukraine. "These guys need a new engine, shock absorbers, the latest radar technology – the list goes on."

Versluys said he had recently been approached by Ukraine's state arms exporter and importer about the possibility of buying his tanks. The UK Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a British-led group that consists of 10 northern European states, has also been in touch since Germany's announcement about its Leopards, he said. "We are open to all options," Versluys said. "But the price has to be fair, we are not a charity."

And while Germany has lifted its ban on exporting Leopards, other hurdles remain. OIP is still unable to sell its large stock of Austrian-made SK-105 light tanks, with Vienna not approving the exports. "It is a big shame because they are in good condition and can be prepared easily," he said.

There has been debate in Brussels about whether it was shortsighted to decommission its tanks. "In hindsight, it is a bit too simple to say that getting rid of tanks was a mistake," said Joe Coelmont, a senior fellow at the Royal Higher Institute for Defence and former brigadier in the Belgian army. "After the fall of the Soviet Union, it was simply unimaginable that there would be a second world war-style battle in Europe. With the government defence budget cuts, the army had to make decisions, and cutting older, expensive tanks was the most logical choice."

At the hangar, Versluys dismissed accusations made by some in Belgium that he was trying to profit from the war. "Everyone thinks we are making lots of money, but look around you, so far the hangar is full," he said.

"We took in these tanks when no one wanted them. Now, I would very much like to see them in Ukraine."

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HEADLINE	01/31 Iran couple filmed dancing jailed 10yrs
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/iranian-couple-filmed-dancing-in-tehran-are-jailed-for-10-years">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/iranian-couple-filmed-dancing-in-tehran-are-jailed-for-10-years</a>

GIST	<p>An Iranian court has handed jail sentences of more than 10 years each to a young couple who danced in front of one of Tehran's main landmarks in a video seen as a symbol of defiance against the regime, activists have said.</p> <p>Astiyazh Haghighi and her fiance, Amir Mohammad Ahmadi, both in their early 20s, were arrested in early November after a video went viral showing them dancing romantically in front of the Azadi Tower.</p> <p>Haghighi was not wearing a headscarf, in defiance of Iran's strict rules. Women are also not allowed to dance in public, let alone with a man.</p> <p>A revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced them each to 10 years and six months in prison, as well as imposing bans on using the internet and leaving Iran, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said.</p> <p>The couple, who already had a following in Tehran as popular Instagram bloggers, were convicted of "encouraging corruption and public prostitution" as well as "gathering with the intention of disrupting national security", it said.</p> <p>HRANA cited sources close to their families as saying they had been deprived of lawyers during the court proceedings, and attempts to secure their release on bail had been rejected.</p> <p>It said Haghighi was now in Qarchak prison for women, outside Tehran, whose conditions are regularly condemned by activists.</p> <p>Iranian authorities have clamped down severely on all forms of dissent since Mahsa Amini's death in September. The death of Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly violating the headscarf rules, sparked protests that have turned into a movement against the regime.</p> <p>At least 14,000 people have been arrested, according to the United Nations, ranging from prominent celebrities, journalists and lawyers to ordinary people who took to the streets.</p> <p>The couple's video had been hailed as a symbol of the freedoms demanded by the protest movement, with Ahmadi at one moment lifting his partner in the air as her long hair flowed behind.</p> <p>One of the main icons of the Iranian capital, the futuristic Azadi (Freedom) Tower is a place of huge sensitivity. It opened under the rule of the last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in the early 1970s, when it was known as the Shahyad (In Memory of the Shah) Tower.</p> <p>It was renamed after the shah was ousted in 1979 with the creation of the Islamic republic. Its architect, a member of the Bahá'í faith, which is not recognised in today's Iran, now lives in exile.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 US company offers Reapers to Ukraine: \$1</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-company-offers-advanced-drones-to-ukraine-for-one-dollar-with-caveat-11675203260">https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-company-offers-advanced-drones-to-ukraine-for-one-dollar-with-caveat-11675203260</a>
GIST	<p>A U.S. weapons maker is offering to sell the Ukraine government two Reaper MQ-9 drones for a dollar to help the country defend itself as it prepares for <a href="#">an expected Russian offensive</a>.</p> <p>The deal would require Kyiv to spend about \$10 million to prepare and ship the aircraft to Ukraine, and about \$8 million each year for maintenance and sustainment of the older model drones, which currently aren't being used in Ukraine.</p> <p>The proposal would include a ground control station to operate the drones almost anywhere, according to a letter reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. The proposal was made by Linden Blue, chief</p>

	<p>executive officer of General Atomics, which makes the Reapers, to Ukraine's defense attaché in Washington last week.</p> <p>The White House, which would have to approve the sale, declined to comment. The Ukrainian government also declined to comment.</p> <p>A spokesman for General Atomics said the company couldn't comment on specific deals, but that "we do believe Ukraine needs a capability like the Reaper, and soon."</p> <p>"General Atomics has been discussing the requirements of the Ukrainian armed forces with their government for many months, and remains committed to supporting them in any way possible," said C. Mark Brinkley, the spokesman for General Atomics.</p> <p>The U.S. has provided more than 700 smaller drones to Ukraine over the past year, including tactical Switchblade drones. Those drones aren't armed, but can be carried in backpacks and are used to crash into targets. They have been used extensively to defend Ukrainian positions.</p> <p>The Reaper, however, is a much more sophisticated drone with significantly longer ranges, speeds and capabilities. The Reaper has a wingspan of about 66 feet and can be armed. It can fly for more than 24 hours. The company is offering an older version of the drone, MQ-9A Block 1 aircraft, which would normally cost several million dollars a piece.</p> <p>The drones could be used to gather intelligence as well as surveillance and reconnaissance, but have the ability to carry weapons.</p> <p>General Atomics didn't say how much of those costs it would receive.</p> <p>The Reaper drone along with the Gray Eagle, also made by General Atomics, would allow Ukrainian forces to conduct strikes and surveillance over Russian troops from a safer distance. The White House has <a href="#">resisted efforts to provide the Gray Eagles</a>, which are currently operated by the U.S. Army, over fears that sensitive technology on board the plane, including the camera, could fall into Russian hands if the aircraft were brought down.</p> <p>The Reapers, which are larger and have a bigger payload, are flown by the U.S. Air Force.</p> <p>The sale of the drones would still require the Biden administration to approve the transfer of the technology to Ukraine. However, General Atomics is proposing to sell the Reapers directly to the Ukraine government, as opposed to through the U.S. government.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 France seizes Iran weapons to Yemen</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/french-forces-seize-iranian-supplied-weapons-bound-for-yemen-11675242819?mod=hp_lead_pos7">https://www.wsj.com/articles/french-forces-seize-iranian-supplied-weapons-bound-for-yemen-11675242819?mod=hp_lead_pos7</a>
GIST	<p>Elite French special forces seized a boatload of Iranian-supplied weapons and ammunition bound for militants in Yemen as part of a deepening effort to contain Tehran, according to officials familiar with the operation.</p> <p>On Jan. 15, the officials said, a French warship stopped a suspected smuggling ship off the Yemeni coast where the specially trained French team boarded the boat. On board, the officials said, the French military discovered more than 3,000 assault rifles, a half million rounds of ammunition and 20 antitank guided missiles.</p> <p>The operation, which was coordinated with the U.S. military, is the outgrowth of a more proactive French role in challenging weapons smuggling in the Middle East.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Home prices fell in Nov; 5<sup>th</sup> straight month</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/home-prices-fell-in-november-for-fifth-straight-month-11675175601?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s">https://www.wsj.com/articles/home-prices-fell-in-november-for-fifth-straight-month-11675175601?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s</a>
GIST	<p>Home prices declined in November from the prior month as <a href="#">higher mortgage-interest rates</a> made home purchases less affordable for home buyers.</p> <p>The S&amp;P CoreLogic Case-Shiller National Home Price Index, which measures home prices across the nation, fell 0.6% in November compared with October, the fifth straight month-over-month decline.</p> <p>On a year-over-year basis, the index rose 7.7% in November, down from <a href="#">a 9.2% annual rate the prior month</a>.</p> <p>Existing-home sales dropped 17.8% in 2022 to <a href="#">the lowest level since 2014</a>, as a surge in mortgage rates brought <a href="#">the pandemic-driven housing boom</a> to an abrupt halt.</p> <p>Many economists expect prices to continue to slide from their spring peaks, with some calling for year-over-year price declines later this year. Home prices fell 3.6% between June and November, according to the Case-Shiller index. Prices are declining fastest in Western markets, such as Phoenix, where prices fell 1.9% in November from the prior month, and Las Vegas, where prices dropped 1.7%.</p> <p>“The S&amp;P CoreLogic Case-Shiller Index showcases the slowdown in housing transactions toward the tail end of 2022, as homebuyers worn tired by the relentless surge in mortgage rates took a bigger step back from the market,” said George Ratiu, senior economist at Realtor.com. News Corp, parent of The Wall Street Journal, operates Realtor.com.</p> <p>The Case-Shiller index, which measures repeat-sales data, reports on a two-month delay and reflects a three-month moving average. Homes usually go under contract a month or two before they close, so the November data is based on purchase decisions made earlier in the year.</p> <p>The median existing-home price rose 2.3% in December from a year earlier to \$366,900, according to the National Association of Realtors.</p> <p>The Case-Shiller 10-city index gained 6.3% over the year ended in November, compared with an 8% increase in October. The 20-city index rose 6.8%, after an annual gain of 8.6% in October. Price growth decelerated in all of the 20 cities.</p> <p>Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expected the 20-city index to gain 7%.</p> <p>Miami had the fastest annual home-price growth in the country, at 18.4%, followed by Tampa, at 16.9%. The weakest market was San Francisco, where prices fell 1.6% on an annual basis.</p> <p>A separate measure of home-price growth by the Federal Housing Finance Agency, also released Tuesday, found an 8.2% increase in home prices in November from a year earlier. The FHFA index fell 0.1% in November from the prior month on a seasonally adjusted basis.</p> <p>“While higher mortgage rates have suppressed demand, low inventories of homes for sale have helped maintain relatively flat house prices,” said Nataliya Polkovnichenko, supervisory economist at FHFA.</p> <p>Also on Tuesday, the Census Bureau reported that the homeownership rate ticked up to 65.9% in the fourth quarter, up from 65.5% a year earlier. For households headed by someone under 35 years old, a key source of home-buying demand, the homeownership rate rose to 38.7% from 38.3% a year earlier.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Hindu vigilantes anti-Christian violence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/31/india-chhattisgarh-christians-violence-attacks/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/31/india-chhattisgarh-christians-violence-attacks/</a>

NARAYANPUR, India — Over two decades of practicing and proselytizing Christianity, Badinath Salam had been kicked out of his home several times and often harassed. But in December, he recalled, the vitriol turned virulent.

Leaders in his Indigenous Indian village beat drums to summon all 100 households to a clearing, he said. There, gathered villagers pummeled their Christian neighbors, who made up one-fifth of their village, and left Salam hospitalized for three days.

When the drumbeats began again a week later, on Jan. 9, Salam ran for his life. In this part of central India, he wasn't the only Christian forced to flee.

Since December, Hindu vigilantes in Chhattisgarh state in eastern India, enraged by the spread of Christianity and rallied by local political leaders, have assaulted and displaced hundreds of Christian converts in dozens of villages and left a trail of damaged churches, according to interviews with local Christians and activists and as seen during a recent trip to the area.

That visit to the remote region — a day's drive from the nearest airport — revealed the extent of the chaos and its uneasy aftermath. In villages, bruised and beaten Christian converts picked through the rubble of churches destroyed by mobs wielding sledgehammers. In dusty townships, Hindu nationalist leaders led impassioned rallies promising more action against Christian conversions. In an empty government gym of the dusty township of Narayanpur, evicted families including Salam's sought refuge, sleeping on mats next to a few sacks of spare clothes and grain.

The violence played out in one of the most culturally unique parts of India, a stretch of forested hills where missionaries from different religions and even Maoist guerrillas have long vied for the hearts and souls of Indigenous tribes. But the episode also illustrated a broader truth about India today: that antipathy toward the Abrahamic religions of Islam and Christianity — often portrayed as alien religions brought to India by its historical invaders — can be wielded as an effective mobilizing force for political ends.

Across India, reports of violence against Muslims often increase in the run-up to elections, a [phenomenon](#) that some [political scientists](#) have [attributed](#) to attempts by Hindu parties to energize their base. In the region of southern Chhattisgarh known as Bastar, the boogeyman has been the Christian.

The violence that roiled Bastar began in December and eventually affected about 100 villages, local activists said.

On Jan. 2, members of a local Hindu group known as the Janjati Suraksha Manch stormed a Catholic church in Narayanpur town, where they destroyed statues and threw rocks through stained-glass windows. On Jan. 12, more than 200 men in Chhimdi village climbed onto the roof of the small church built by Jai Singh Potai and tore it down. Around the corner, they smashed another church and wrote on a blackboard: "If you don't leave Christianity then the same will happen again."

"It's not going to work between Hindus and Christians," Potai said as he surveyed the damage one night under cover of darkness. Soon, he would move away for good, he said.

For a century, the poor, Indigenous tribes that lived here outside India's caste-based society, worshipping trees and rivers rather than the Hindu pantheon, were seen as ripe for conversion by Catholic missions that gradually took root.

But in the past two decades, residents and outside experts say, religious tensions have escalated after a new wave of evangelical missionaries swept in from south India and abroad, prompting a backlash from local leaders and Hindu nationalists, who also have gained traction.

Nandini Sundar, a sociologist at the Delhi School of Economics, said the increase in conversions to Christianity in Bastar was part of the same global evangelical movement that has achieved rapid growth in other countries, including the United States and Brazil.

“Except here, Christians are in the minority, and they get beat up, and the Hindutva fundamentalists have state support,” she said, using a term for Hindu nationalist ideology. “There is aggressive fundamentalism from both sides, and it’s being played out through these villagers.”

The latest available government statistics, from 2011, show only 1.9 percent of Chhattisgarh state is Christian, in line with the 2.3 percent, or 28 million people, across all of India who are Christians.

But that may be an underestimate, because the government counts only people who identify themselves as Christian in official documents. In Bastar, the true number of Christian believers — or “vishwasi,” as they call themselves — may be closer to a fifth of the population, say activists on both sides of the Christian-Hindu divide.

Salam’s wife, Sonari, became the first Christian convert in their village of Remavandh 20 years ago. She was left with an infant orphan, the daughter of her dead sister, and handed her out of desperation to an Indian Christian couple in Narayanpur. The couple took the child in, Sonari recalled, and invited her to their house church.

Within three years, “everyone in the village saw how they took care of her, and they became inspired,” Sonari Salam said. “One after another, they started to come.”

Before long, Sonari’s husband, Badinath, began proselytizing himself. During times when traveling preachers did not stop in Remavandh, he would lead sermons about the miracles of Jesus and the promise of eternal life. As his small congregation grew, to about 10 households, Badinath Salam said, so did his neighbors’ resentment rise.

Still, tensions never boiled over, he said, until 2018, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — the Hindu nationalist party that controls India’s central government but lags politically in Chhattisgarh — lost power in the state to the Indian National Congress party.

“Once they started losing, the troubles started,” Salam said.

### **Souls and votes**

Christianity was said to have been brought to the Indian subcontinent by the apostle Saint Thomas, who landed in Kerala in A.D. 52.

In the early years of independent India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his left-leaning Indian National Congress party fretted about an influx of missionaries overwhelming India’s tribal cultures and banned foreign missionaries.

Those on the political right worried, too. In the 1990s, Dilip Singh Judeo, a BJP leader, began holding “homecoming” ceremonies in Chhattisgarh. He would gather Christian converts and wash their feet. Hindu priests would smash a coconut on the ground. After that, the Indigenous men and women — even if they never practiced Hinduism in the first place — would be declared Hindus.

“These unclaimed souls, so to speak, were always seen as up for grabs by everybody,” said Shalini Gera, a prominent human rights lawyer based in Bastar.

In earlier decades, Catholic missions gradually embedded themselves into the community, Gera said. Statues of the Virgin Mary were sometimes draped in saris. Carvings of biblical characters had Indigenous facial features. Some churches conducted marriage ceremonies according to hybrid tribal-Christian customs.

But when evangelical Christians arrived with their fiery sermons in the past decade, they made swift inroads, Gera said. They also sparked local anxieties.

Dinesh Kashyap, a former member of Parliament from the BJP who lost his seat in 2019, said the situation for local Hindus was dire. Evangelists were roaming the countryside and enticing poor, gullible villagers, already converting 40 percent of them, he said.

“They offer food, clothes and money,” Kashyap said, sitting in his office. “They even get homes built.”

Kashyap has led his own “homecoming” foot-washing ceremonies, organized rallies to denounce Christian conversions and led protests to demand that Christians be denied government benefits reserved for tribal peoples. In recent weeks, he has helped mobilize the Janjati Suraksha Manch, which Christians say is behind the violence.

Kashyap denied wrongdoing, saying he has been advocating peaceful protest.

Hindu villagers “do not want to fight anybody,” he said. “But they are very concerned about conversions. If someone in your family suddenly changes their faith, wouldn’t you find that odd? That’s how people in this region feel.”

Kashyap, trailed by bodyguards carrying submachine guns, hopped into an SUV on a recent afternoon and pulled up to a rally where local BJP leaders were demanding the release of Hindus who had been jailed for recent attacks on churches. State officials led by the rival Congress party were abusing their powers by denying the Hindus bail, the BJP leaders told a small crowd.

One by one, the speakers described the dispute over conversions not just as a battle over faith, but also as a battle at the ballot box. Later this year, state elections will be held in Chhattisgarh.

“If we tolerate this government’s actions, they will destroy tribal identity and culture,” Raja Ram Todem, a state assemblyman who also mobilized the Janjati Suraksha Manch, said into the microphone. “Prepare yourselves to uproot this government in the upcoming elections.”

### **Fear radiates**

In mid-January, local police announced several arrests — angering local BJP leaders — but restored calm. Last week, police said they had escorted all of the evicted Christians back home.

But many remained pessimistic. “This will go on until the next election,” said one Christian leader in Narayanpur, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisals.

In recent weeks, more reports of attacks against Christians elsewhere in India have surfaced. A church in Mumbai’s Mahim neighborhood was vandalized. A group of Jesuit nonprofit workers was reportedly assaulted in Maharashtra state. In Uttar Pradesh state, South Korean students were accosted at a university by men who accused them of being missionaries, making headlines in national newspapers.

Fear has also radiated across Chhattisgarh. At a recent Sunday service at the AIM Bethel Pentecostal Church, located in an alley in the district neighboring Narayanpur, men and women held their arms aloft, swaying to a rock band and crying “Hallelujah!”

Near the back, the newest member of the 300-strong congregation, a nervous woman named Pavan, squeezed her eyes shut and prayed fervently. Leaders in her own village near Narayanpur were threatening to evict her, she said, so she got up before dawn, wrapped herself in a sweater and quietly got on a bus to attend this service, three hours away.

Ten years ago, she suffered depression and attempted suicide before finding Christianity, she said. “He never left me when I needed him,” she said. “So how can I leave Jesus now?”

The church pastor, Able Varghese, ordered an assistant to close the church gates. His neighbors belonged to the Vishva Hindu Parishad, a Hindu nationalist organization, and some worshipers feared unnecessary confrontation.

Varghese, a native of Kerala in south India, recalled moving to Chhattisgarh in 1997 with no church and no followers. "There was always pressure, but it has never gotten so extreme," he said.

And today? Varghese smiled.

"I've dedicated my life to spreading the word of Jesus. If I die a day early, so be it," he said. "It is in the hands of God."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Healthcare lags: worst, most expensive</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/01/us-still-has-the-worst-most-expensive-health-care-of-any-high-income-country/">https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/01/us-still-has-the-worst-most-expensive-health-care-of-any-high-income-country/</a>
GIST	<p>Americans spend an exorbitant amount of money on health care and have for years. As a country, the US spends more on health care than any other high-income country in the world—on the basis of both per-person costs and a share of gross domestic product. Yet, you wouldn't know it from looking at major health metrics in years past; the US has relatively abysmal health. And, if anything, the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the US health care system's failures relative to its peers, according to <a href="#">a new analysis by the Commonwealth Fund</a>.</p> <p>Compared with other high-income peers, the US has the shortest life expectancy at birth, the highest rate of avoidable deaths, the highest rate of newborn deaths, the highest rate of maternal deaths, the highest rate of adults with multiple chronic conditions, and the highest rate of obesity, the new analysis found.</p> <p>"Americans are living shorter, less healthy lives because our health system is not working as well as it could be," Munira Gunja, lead author of the analysis and a senior researcher for The Commonwealth Fund's International Program in Health Policy and Practice Innovation, said in a press statement. "To catch up with other high-income countries, the administration and Congress would have to expand access to health care, act aggressively to control costs, and invest in health equity and social services we know can lead to a healthier population."</p> <p><b>Dying young</b></p> <p>Overall, the analysis paints a grim picture of how much catching up the US has to do. In terms of life expectancy, the US has trailed its peers for years but took a nosedive during the pandemic, while other countries fared better. In 2020, the average life expectancy at birth in the US was 77 years, three years lower than the average for high-income countries. The next lowest life expectancy among high-income countries was from the UK, which had a 2020 life expectancy at birth of 80.4 years.</p> <p><a href="#">Provisional data for 2021</a> suggests US life expectancy fell nearly a full year further, from 77.0 years to 76.1 years. Relatedly, the US had the highest rate of deaths from COVID-19 in 2020 compared with its high-income peers and was among the lowest of its peers in rates of COVID-19 vaccination.</p> <p>In a particularly shameful set of statistics, the US continues to have the highest infant and maternal mortality rates of any other high-income country. In 2020, there were 5.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the US, while the average among high-income countries was 4.1 infant deaths. In Norway, there were 1.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. The health care system is also failing mothers. In 2020, there were 24 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, about 2.5 times higher than the average for high-income countries. The country with the next highest maternal mortality rate was New Zealand with 13.6 per 100,000 live births.</p> <p>With many US states now rapidly turning back the clock on reproductive rights and maternity care, the US's appallingly high rates of <a href="#">infant and maternal deaths</a> are <a href="#">expected to worsen</a>.</p> <p>Beyond pregnancy, Americans are dying from other conditions that are treatable or preventable at a rate far higher than those seen in all other high-income countries. In 2020, 336 US deaths per 100,000 people</p>

were avoidable, while the average among high-income countries was just 225 deaths per 100,000. The rate of avoidable deaths has been rising in the US since 2015, the analysis notes.

### Sicker

That tracks with the finding that Americans are more likely than their high-income-country peers to have multiple chronic conditions. In 2020, 30.4 percent of US adults said that they had previously been diagnosed with two or more chronic conditions in their life. Among other high-income countries, no more than a quarter of adults reported having two or more chronic conditions. America's high obesity rate may play into that discrepancy. The US has a higher obesity rate than any other high-income country. In fact, it's nearly two times higher than the average of its peers.

While Americans are dying young from avoidable conditions, they're also spending an exorbitant amount on health care. The US spent 17.8 percent of its GDP on health care in 2020, nearly twice as much as the average of 9.6 percent among high-income countries. On a per-person basis, it outspent its peers, paying nearly \$12,000 per person via government insurance programs, private insurance coverage, and out-of-pocket costs. The country that came the closest to US spending was Germany, with a little over \$7,000 per-person spending.

The data hints that these high prices are discouraging Americans from getting the care they need, potentially feeding into the country's high rates of chronic conditions and avoidable deaths. In the analysis, the US had among the lowest rate of doctor visits, with just four per year. The average was 5.7. The US also has one of the lowest rates of practicing physicians per 100,000 people—2.6 per 100,000, while the average is 3.7.

The US was the only high-income country in the analysis that does not guarantee health coverage. People in most other high-income countries have guaranteed health coverage with the option of buying supplemental private coverage.

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HEADLINE	01/31 US: Russia not complying nuclear treaty
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/politics/us-russia-nuclear-treat.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/politics/us-russia-nuclear-treat.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The State Department told Congress on Tuesday that Russia was not complying with the <a href="#">only nuclear arms control treaty</a> remaining between the two nations, jeopardizing a source of stability in their relationship.</p> <p>The agency said Russia had refused to allow American inspectors into nuclear weapons facilities, an obligation under the treaty known as New START, which was renewed for five years in February 2021.</p> <p>“Russia’s refusal to facilitate inspection activities prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the treaty and threatens the viability of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control,” the State Department said in a statement on Tuesday.</p> <p>It added that “Russia has also failed to comply with the New START treaty obligation to convene a session of the bilateral consultative commission in accordance with the treaty-mandated timeline.”</p> <p>The State Department called on Russia to return to compliance by allowing inspectors onto its territory, as it had done for more than a decade, and by agreeing to hold a session of the commission, in which officials could discuss issues related to the treaty and nuclear arms control.</p> <p>Russia announced in August that it was suspending the access of American inspectors to its nuclear arsenal. And in November, it <a href="#">canceled</a> a diplomatic meeting of the bilateral commission in Cairo during which officials had planned to review compliance with the treaty. The commission last met in October 2021.</p>



Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei A. Ryabkov, said Moscow was postponing the meeting because the United States "did not want to take into account Russia's priorities, they wanted to discuss only the resumption of inspections," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"The situation around Ukraine also had an impact," the agency quoted Ryabkov as saying.

After Russia's announcement on inspections in August, Ned Price, a State Department spokesman, said the two nations "have continued to provide data declarations and notifications in accordance with the treaty."

The treaty was signed in 2010, and it has ensured since 2011 that the two nations limit their strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,500 warheads each. The main verification mechanism of the treaty centers on reciprocal inspections in which each country can examine data and evidence around the nuclear arsenal.

When Russia suspended inspections, it said that U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia after it invaded Ukraine made it too difficult for its inspectors to get access to the United States. The State Department said that was false.

After the pandemic began in March 2020, the two sides suspended inspections, and U.S. officials have been saying they hope to get the practice back on a regular schedule.

The New START agreement was set to expire on Feb. 5, 2021, but the two governments announced a five-year extension two days before that deadline. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February last year by the Russian military under the command of President Vladimir V. Putin makes any further negotiations over arms control difficult. Since the war began, President Biden has put on hold any diplomatic discussions over new arms control treaties.

Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear nonproliferation expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, said the deterioration of New START was troubling and did not bode well for renewal prospects in 2026.

"Things look very grim right now," he said. Though "the treaty is strongly in both parties' interests," he added, "the Russians seem to be allowing what's going on in Ukraine to spill across all policies."

"I think an unconstrained arms race between Russia and the United States is not in either of our interests, and that is what will happen," Mr. Lewis said.

New START does not cover the use of tactical nuclear weapons. U.S. and European officials have debated whether Mr. Putin might use such a weapon in Ukraine. That [possibility was intensely discussed last fall](#) in Washington and other European capitals because of specific data from intelligence agencies, but talk of it among officials has since quieted down.

In August 2019, the Trump administration [announced](#) it was ending another arms control treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces agreement, after having suspended it that February. The United States had accused Russia of repeatedly violating the treaty, which had been active since the Reagan administration. U.S. officials also said they were increasingly concerned about China, which was not a party to the treaty, and insisted they did not want their ability to deploy missiles in the Asia-Pacific region to be hamstrung.

The ending of that agreement left New START as the only remaining nuclear arms treaty between the United States and Russia.

"The United States continues to view nuclear arms control as an indispensable means of strengthening U.S., ally and global security," the State Department said on Tuesday. "It is all the more important during times of tension when guardrails and clarity matter most."

HEADLINE	01/31 Ukraine, Russia pour forces into battle
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-bakhmut.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-bakhmut.html</a>
GIST	<p>Russian forces are ratcheting up pressure on the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, pouring in waves of fighters to break Ukraine's resistance and targeting supply lines in a bloody campaign aimed at securing Moscow's first significant battlefield victory in months.</p> <p>Eleven months after Moscow launched its invasion, <a href="#">Bakhmut</a> and the areas around it have become a center of intense fighting, with growing importance as both sides add forces to the battle. Russia intensified its effort to capture Bakhmut, which may be key to seizing the entire Donbas area, after months of bombardment beginning in the summer yielded few gains.</p> <p>"The situation is very tough," the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, said in a recent <a href="#">nightly address</a> after meeting with military leaders. He said, "There are constant attempts to break through our defense."</p> <p>Over the course of the war, firepower has proved critical to Russian gains, but the battle for Bakhmut has been different.</p> <p>Increasingly, Ukrainian fighters and analysts say, Moscow has been relying on a cruder tactic: trying to tip the city into its win column through the sheer weight of troop numbers. As a result, the Ukrainians say, Russian casualties in recent fighting in Bakhmut have been higher than in previous months.</p> <p>Part of Russia's evolving strategy appears to be to overwhelm Ukrainian defenses with waves of soldiers, many drawn from President Vladimir V. Putin's <a href="#">call-up</a> of 300,000 men in September. That would be a departure from Moscow's summer campaigns elsewhere in the Donbas, when artillery pounded cities for weeks before Russia launched a sustained ground offensive.</p> <p>In Bakhmut, Ukraine, too, has suffered heavy casualties. But the calculation for each side is not the same.</p> <p>Michael Kofman, the director of Russian studies at CNA, a research institute in Arlington, Va., said the battle there has cost Russia more in human losses, because its fighters have often fought on foot, unsupported by armored vehicles. But while Ukraine's losses may be fewer in number, he said on a recent episode of a military affairs podcast, <a href="#">War on the Rocks</a>, they may be more painful.</p> <p>Many of the troops fighting for Russia around Bakhmut have been <a href="#">recruited from prison</a>, and are less well trained than many of the soldiers Russia began the war with. Ukraine has mostly relied on national guard and other forces to hold its main defensive line in Bakhmut, with better-trained infantry units rushing in if those fighters are attacked or retreat.</p> <p>"Ukraine's been forced to essentially trade higher-quality troops to hold Bakhmut against expendable Russian forces," Mr. Kofman said on the podcast. That, he said, could "impede Ukrainian plans for an offensive down the line."</p> <p>Bakhmut's strategic value, military analysts say, is as a crossroads for some of the region's highways. Capturing the city, which is in Donetsk Province, would not guarantee that Moscow could make major advances in the east, but it would put Russian forces in better position to do so.</p> <p>Despite suffering setbacks elsewhere in eastern Ukraine and in the south, since last fall, Russian troops edging toward Bakhmut from the east have gradually squeezed the city. This month, they took <a href="#">the salt mining town of Soledar</a>, six miles to the northeast.</p> <p>To the south, Ukrainian soldiers who recently left the front line said that a paved road that had been their main supply route into Bakhmut was now within range of Russian artillery and tanks, though still in Ukrainian hands. This leaves Ukraine relying on a road west to the town of Chasiv Yar, itself the target of frequent Russian attacks and harder to traverse.</p>

In past battles in the Donbas, Russian forces have often aimed to encircle a city first, leaving Ukraine to decide whether to expend costly resources to defend it. The pitched battle over Bakhmut suggests that Ukraine has overcome its qualms about engaging directly in a drawn-out fight for a city and is prepared to sustain losses in the hope that it can deplete its enemy's strength still further.

On Tuesday, fighting was also ranging elsewhere in Donetsk, in the town of Vuhledar.

Moscow has moved from small-scale probing attacks around the town to a [more concentrated assault](#), Britain's Ministry of Defense said on Tuesday, two days after Mr. Zelensky described Vuhledar as among the areas "under constant Russian attack."

The town, which had a prewar population of around 14,000, has been almost destroyed, but a Ukrainian military official emphasized on Tuesday that it was still under Kyiv's control.

Military analysts say that Ukrainian forces have been using their positions in and around Vuhledar to [launch attacks](#) on the region's main railway hub in the occupied town of Volnovakha, less than 10 miles away, in a bid to weaken Russia's resupply efforts. The head of Ukraine's regional military administration, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said on Tuesday that there had been "intense fire" in the area.

In the coming weeks and months, as both sides prepare for the offensives expected in the spring, Ukraine will be strengthened by new weaponry, including tanks and rocket systems supplied by the United States and other allies.

On Tuesday, the French defense minister [announced](#) that his country would deliver 12 more Caesar howitzers to Ukraine and step up efforts to train Ukrainian soldiers, a significant increase in military aid from a country that had recently shown reluctance to part with more of [its advanced artillery](#).

And last week, the United States and Germany agreed, after a prolonged Ukrainian campaign, to [provide battle tanks](#) to Ukraine, among other military aid. Ukraine is also pressing its allies for jet fighters, although President Biden has resisted sending Ukraine F-16s.

But for now, the many new troops drafted in the fall are giving Moscow an advantage.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Air Force: China mill North Dakota a 'threat'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/corn-mill-fufeng-china-north-dakota.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/corn-mill-fufeng-china-north-dakota.html</a>
GIST	<p>After more than a year of debate about whether a <a href="#">Chinese company's plan to build a corn mill</a> in North Dakota was an economic boon or a geopolitical risk, an assistant secretary of the Air Force has weighed in with a warning that the "project presents a significant threat to national security."</p> <p>The <a href="#">letter</a> from Assistant Secretary Andrew P. Hunter, released publicly on Tuesday by North Dakota's senators, noted the proximity of Grand Forks Air Force Base to the proposed mill and said the project raised "near- and long-term risks of significant impacts to our operations in the area."</p> <p>The debate over Fufeng USA's plan to build a giant milling facility on the edge of Grand Forks, less than 15 miles from the Air Force base, divided the Republican power structure in North Dakota and showed just how swiftly the economic relationship between the United States and China had changed.</p> <p>Though the Air Force letter did not name specific threats, residents had voiced numerous concerns. Some in town said it was unwise to deepen economic ties with China, while others speculated that the mill could be used for spying on the Air Force, which the company denied.</p> <p>The city's Republican mayor, Brandon Bochenski, a former supporter of the project, said on Tuesday that because of the federal guidance, he would move to block construction by trying to deny building permits and by refusing to connect city infrastructure to the building site.</p>

“The Air Force left ambiguity off the table,” the state’s two senators, John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer, both Republicans, said in a joint [statement](#) that called for Grand Forks officials to work with them “to find an American company to develop the agriculture project.”

The corn mill was the sort of job-creating opportunity that cities have long fought over, and one that just a few years ago would have been seen by most as an unambiguous win. Both Mr. Bochenski and North Dakota’s Republican governor, Doug Burgum, [celebrated in late 2021](#) when Grand Forks landed the project, which would have been the city’s largest economic development project in recent history.

But within months after Fufeng chose Grand Forks, a college and military city with 59,000 residents, many in town began speaking out against the project. While some of the opposition focused on property rights and water use, the company’s ties to China and the perceived national security risks became the focus of pushback. Still, the city moved forward, [annexing](#) the field where the mill would be built and entering into a [development agreement](#) with the company.

Mr. Bochenski, a first-term mayor and a former professional hockey player, said in an interview last year that the shifting geopolitical winds had been a challenge for the city. “Are we going to be the first one to basically say no to globalism?” he asked at the time.

But on Tuesday, in light of the Air Force’s letter, Mr. Bochenski said he would seek the City Council’s help to block construction, though he noted that Fufeng USA, the American subsidiary of a Chinese company, would still own the land where it had hoped to build.

Work on the project had been paused in recent months while the federal government’s Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States reviewed the company’s plans. That committee ultimately decided that it did [not have jurisdiction](#).

“The response from the federal government during this process can only be viewed as slow and contradictory,” Mr. Bochenski said. “This directive leaves open the question of other entities with Chinese connections across the nation,” he added, including a Chinese-owned aviation company in Grand Forks “and Chinese students and professors at the University of North Dakota.”

Mr. Burgum, who once called the Fufeng mill a “huge opportunity” for his state, said in a statement that he supported the mayor’s decision to stop cooperating with the company given the concerns voiced by the Air Force.

The turnabout in North Dakota comes as the United States rethinks its longstanding trade relationship with China, and as politicians in both parties have come to view the country more as a threat than as an attractive economic partner. Several states are considering bills this year that would limit or ban Chinese land ownership.

Eric Chutorash, Fufeng USA’s chief operating officer, has repeatedly denied that the mill would be used to spy on or harm the United States. He did not immediately respond to requests for comment about the Air Force’s letter. China’s embassy in Washington declined to comment.

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HEADLINE	01/31 US: India as tech partner to counter China
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/business/economy/us-india-technology-partnership.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/business/economy/us-india-technology-partnership.html</a>
GIST	<p>Officials from the United States and India agreed on Tuesday to expand cooperation on advanced weaponry, supercomputing, semiconductors and other high-tech fields, as the Biden administration looks to strengthen its connections with Asian allies and offset China’s dominance of cutting-edge technologies.</p> <p>The agreements followed two days of high-level meetings in Washington between government officials and executives from dozens of companies, the first under a new dialogue about critical and emerging</p>

technologies that President Biden and India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, announced in Tokyo in May.

Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, told reporters on Tuesday that the goal was for technological partnerships to be "the next big milestone" in the U.S.-Indian relationship after a [2016 agreement](#) on nuclear power cooperation. He described the effort as a "big foundational piece of an overall strategy to put the entire democratic world in the Indo-Pacific in a position of strength."

The agreements will be a test of whether the Biden administration can realize its proposal for "[friendshoring](#)" by shifting the manufacturing of certain critical components to friendly countries. Biden officials have expressed concerns about the United States' continued heavy reliance on China for semiconductors, telecommunications parts and other important goods. In recent months they have [clamped down](#) on the sale of advanced semiconductor technology to China, in an effort to stymie an industry that the White House says could give China a military advantage.

Many companies have found it difficult to obtain the factory space and skilled workers they would need to move their supply chains out of China. India has a highly skilled work force and a government that wants to attract more international investment, but multinational companies seeking to operate there continue to complain of onerous regulations, inadequate infrastructure and other barriers.

Both Mr. Biden and Mr. Modi are also propelling closer U.S.-Indian cooperation in efforts to build out the industrial and innovation bases of their countries, Mr. Sullivan said.

The partnerships announced on Tuesday include an agreement between the U.S. and Indian national science agencies to cooperate on artificial intelligence and advanced wireless technology, as well as in other areas.

The countries also pledged to speed up their efforts to jointly produce and develop certain defense technologies, including jet engines, artillery systems and armored infantry vehicles. The United States said it would look to quickly review a new proposal by General Electric to produce a jet engine with India.

Officials also said they would work together to facilitate the build-out of an advanced mobile network in India and look for new cooperation in semiconductor production, including efforts to help India bolster chip research and production that would complement [major investments in the industry](#) in the United States.

The new dialogue would include efforts to work through regulatory barriers, as well as visa restrictions that have prevented talented Indians from working in the United States, the countries said.

But experts said India would need to continue to reform its permitting and tax system to lure more foreign manufacturing companies. And the United States would need to reform restrictions on transferring defense-related technology outside the country, they said, if it hopes to work with India to produce jet engines and other advanced weapons.

Analysts also noted that many of the technology partnerships would hinge on new connections between the countries' private sectors, meaning that the agreements could go only so far.

India's frequent purchases of Russian military equipment and close ties with Russia also present another wrinkle to the planned partnership. But Biden officials said they believed that the cooperation could accelerate India's move away from Russia, to the benefit of its relationship with the United States.

On Monday, Mr. Sullivan, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and India's national security adviser, Ajit Doval, met with more than 40 company executives, university presidents and others, including executives from Lockheed Martin, Tata, Adani Defense and Aerospace, and Micron Technology.

	<p>“It has the potential to take U.S.-India ties to the next level,” Tanvi Madan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said of the initiative. The trick, she added, will be “getting from potential and promises to outcomes.”</p> <p>“Many of the decisions to collaborate or not will be made in the private sector, and companies will be assessing the business case as much as, if not more than, the strategic case,” Ms. Madan said.</p> <p>India has traditionally been known as a difficult partner for the United States in trade negotiations. In the talks that the Biden administration is currently carrying out in Asia, known as the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, India bowed out of the trade portion of the deal, though it has continued to negotiate in areas like clean energy, supply chains and labor standards.</p> <p>But analysts said the Indian government was far more motivated on national security matters, and particularly tempted by the prospects of working with the United States to cultivate cutting-edge tech industries.</p> <p>“We both have a common purpose here, which is the fear that China is going to eat our lunch in all the sectors unless we find areas to cooperate and collaborate,” said Richard M. Rossow, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Crime prevention camera captured beating</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/us/skycop-camera-tyre-nichols-memphis.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/us/skycop-camera-tyre-nichols-memphis.html</a>
GIST	<p>MEMPHIS — The body cameras worn by the Memphis police officers who stopped Tyre Nichols recorded his anguished cries and the conflicting orders that were virtually impossible for him to obey. As the officers punched and pepper-sprayed him, though, those cameras were often jostled, pointed away or dark.</p> <p>But the residential street where the officers had caught up with Mr. Nichols after he ran from them on the night of Jan. 7 happened to have another camera trained on it, affixed to a utility pole in a white metal box with a bright blue light.</p> <p>It was one of the hundreds of SkyCop cameras, as they are known, that the Memphis Police Department has installed around the city. It was watching from above, recording as Mr. Nichols was beaten and then as officers and medics delayed providing aid. He died three days later.</p> <p>“Glory be to God that a SkyCop camera was there to catch what happened,” Van D. Turner Jr., the president of the Memphis branch of the N.A.A.C.P., said last week.</p> <p>The overhead footage, publicly released on Friday along with some of the officers’ body camera videos, has been widely regarded as critical in shaping the public’s understanding of what unfolded after the police pulled over Mr. Nichols that night, by offering an unobstructed bird’s-eye view.</p> <p>Camera systems like SkyCop, which have been adopted by police departments around the country, have been criticized by activists and privacy advocates as a costly investment that does little to deter crime while adding to the overbearing presence that the police often have in neighborhoods — especially poor ones — where the cameras have proliferated.</p> <p>Yet in this case, the round-the-clock camera has been a vital tool for accountability as Mr. Nichols’s death has unleashed pain and anger in Memphis and around the country.</p> <p>“It just so happens that in the case of Tyre, those cameras worked out in that way,” said Chelsea Glass, an organizer with Decarcerate Memphis, a group pushing for overhauling the criminal justice system.</p>



The bulk of the footage released by city officials on Friday came from body cameras and showed Mr. Nichols, who the police initially said had been stopped for reckless driving, being pulled from his car and then running away.

But the release also included about 31 minutes of video taken by the SkyCop, starting with a feed showing a tranquil winding street lined with brick homes before panning over to where officers had stopped Mr. Nichols on foot.

From then on, it captured a scene of escalating brutality as well as the immediate aftermath: The footage showed the officers kicking Mr. Nichols and pummeling him with a baton. Minutes later, he could be seen slumped on the ground against a police car, without receiving any care from officers or medics who had arrived at the scene.

“That particular video is what, I think, demonstrated not just the inhumanity but the grave disregard for this man’s rights and his life,” said the Rev. Dr. J. Lawrence Turner, the pastor of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, where Mr. Nichols’s funeral is to be held on Wednesday.

“The sky cam video makes the difference,” Pastor Turner said, adding that if “we were only left with the body cam footage,” it would still be harrowing and infuriating, but possibly not as conclusive to prosecutors as they considered charges against the officers. Five of them were charged with second-degree murder, among other things, last week for the death of Mr. Nichols.

The SkyCop camera that captured the beating is one of more than 2,000 that have been stationed around the city, all of which send back live feeds to the Police Department’s real-time crime center. Operators there are able to pan and zoom the cameras like the one providing footage in this case, which have a range of about 200 feet.

“I actually placed that camera there,” said Joe Patty, a retired lieutenant who served as the Police Department’s video surveillance manager and now, as a security consultant, works for SkyCop, a Memphis-based company.

Many of the SkyCop cameras in Memphis were initially installed more than a decade ago, mostly in affluent neighborhoods, as community groups raised the money to buy them and donate them to the city. But in 2016, the city purchased 80 SkyCops and placed them largely in areas that are predominantly African American and impoverished, and that have had persistent struggles with crime.

Even if many in the community expressed gratitude for the SkyCop footage of Mr. Nichols’s beating, it did not erase the skepticism that many still have about the cameras — or more to the point, the police force that operates them.

“It’s not really about the cameras,” said Duane T. Loynes Sr., a professor at Rhodes College in Memphis whose research focuses on the strained relationship between the Black community and law enforcement. “It’s about who’s in charge of the cameras.”

Law enforcement agencies around the country have deployed sprawling networks of cameras, with advocates describing them as a powerful tool for combating street crime and guarding against terrorism. Many of those systems now employ more advanced technology, including artificial intelligence and facial recognition. Studies have shown that facial recognition software can return more false matches for African Americans than for white people, a concern that has been raised in Detroit.

In Memphis, Mr. Patty said the SkyCop cameras do not use facial recognition technology, but some of the devices are outfitted with license plate readers and they do have motion sensors that alert the operators to movement.

Mr. Patty said the SkyCops, with their bright blue lights, were designed to be a conspicuous presence in the hope of discouraging criminal activity.

“The unknown factor is what you deterred,” he said. “There’s no way to figure that into an equation.”

Still, Mr. Patty said they were seen as a source of comfort in some neighborhoods, particularly where residents had raised money to install them. “I never had a complaint of someone wanting to take a camera down,” he said. “It was always, ‘Please can we have more.’”

But detractors have pointed out that violent crime increased in Memphis even after SkyCops were installed across the city. Larry Turnage, 64, who lives near the site of Mr. Nichols’s beating, said he did not think they helped. “They’re going to commit crime regardless,” he said. “It doesn’t matter.”

Chad A. Marlow, a senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union who focuses on privacy and surveillance issues, said that studies have shown that mounted camera systems do not deter crime. If anything, he added, the footage of the Memphis officers helped bolster those findings. “The police officers knew the camera was there and obviously it did not deter their bad behavior,” Mr. Marlow said.

“It does from time to time capture evidence of wrongdoing and that is certainly what occurred here,” he added. “But ultimately what you have is a tool that brings more police into these communities and creates more dangerous police interactions, and in this one case, it happens to provide evidence of police misconduct.”

Professor Loynes said the footage showed something that was no surprise to many in Memphis, where nearly two-thirds of residents are Black. “For Black Memphians, they didn’t need to see it, they’ve lived it,” he said.

He said that camera footage alone was not always enough to bring criminal charges against officers or lead to firings and promises of making changes to policing policy. There have been cases, he noted, where video footage had clearly shown police aggression but they had not resulted in criminal charges, like that involving Eric Garner, the 43-year-old Black man from Staten Island who died in 2014 after a New York police officer placed him in a chokehold.

“There’s a completely valid alternative universe where we have those videos,” he said, “and those officers are still not held accountable.”

In this version of events, though, many in the community were praising the charges and the role the SkyCop camera had played. “I’m glad that camera was here,” said Praylen Dickerson, who lives in the neighborhood.

Marcus Belton also stopped by the scene of Mr. Nichols’s beating to pay respects to Mr. Nichols. “It’s a proven fact that it worked then,” Mr. Belton said of the camera above, referring to the night of Jan. 7. “It worked magnificently.”

On Sunday, Mr. Dickerson, 63, brought a single rose to lay at the corner of Castlegate and Bear Creek Lanes, where a memorial for Mr. Nichols has grown in recent days.

He looked up at the camera above the intersection and the white box stamped in blue with the letters “MPD” and the Police Department’s insignia.

“They’re probably watching us right now,” Mr. Dickerson said.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Memphis cops prior reprimand use of force
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/memphis-officers-disciplined-tyre-nichols.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/memphis-officers-disciplined-tyre-nichols.html</a>

Two of the former Memphis police officers charged with killing Tyre Nichols had previously been reprimanded for failing to file required reports about the use of physical force in making arrests, according to records released Tuesday.

In one case from 2019, Officer Desmond Mills Jr. was assisting with an arrest after a traffic stop when he grabbed the suspect by the arms and took her to the ground, personnel records show. After a hearing two years later, Mr. Mills was given a written reprimand for failing to file the mandatory incident report.

The woman arrested in that case had filed a complaint alleging that she was beaten by officers, grabbed by the hair and slammed into a patrol car. The records describe body camera footage showing that two different officers had struggled with the woman for several minutes, with one of them striking her with a baton, before Mr. Mills and others stepped in to assist. The woman “sustained bruises and abrasions during the struggle,” the records say.

Demetrius Haley, another one of the officers charged in Mr. Nichols’s death, was also reprimanded in 2021 for failing to file a report after grabbing someone by the arm to turn them around to make an arrest. Mr. Haley said at a hearing that he had been mistaken about “the amount of force necessary to require” such documentation.

The personnel files were released on the eve of Mr. Nichols’s funeral, which was scheduled for Wednesday with the Rev. Al Sharpton set to deliver the eulogy.

At a news conference on Tuesday evening, Mr. Sharpton, flanked by Mr. Nichols’s family and civil rights activists, reiterated demands for accountability. He called for changes in federal law that would tighten rules on police conduct and make it easier to sue officers accused of wrongdoing, describing what happened to Mr. Nichols as “a disgrace to this country.”

“People from around the world watched the videotape of a man, unarmed and unprovoked, being beat to death by officers of the law,” said Mr. Sharpton, speaking at the Mason Temple, the church where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his final speech the day before he was assassinated.

“We talk a lot about gang bangers in the streets and what colors they wear,” he added. “In Memphis, it looks like they wear the blue color, that uniform.”

Other speakers echoed Mr. Sharpton’s call for stronger federal laws to regulate the police and increase accountability. It had been more than two years since the death of George Floyd, said Bishop Talbert W. Swan II of the Church of God in Christ, and yet lawmakers had not promised changes to the law.

“The stomach to go forward with this change has seemed to have left those that are now comfortably nestled in Congress,” he said. Instead, they “are now saying, ‘Fund the police,’ and have forgotten about the promises that they have made to Black people that put them in power.”

he personnel files released on Tuesday also showed that two other officers charged in Mr. Nichols’s death had disciplinary histories. Officer Emmitt Martin III was suspended for not checking his vehicle after a shift, a problem that came to light when another officer found a gun inside the vehicle. Later, Mr. Martin received a one-day suspension after failing to take a report when he responded to a reported domestic violence case.

Officer Justin Smith was suspended for two days in 2021 after crashing his vehicle, according to the records. He and another driver were injured in the crash.

The fifth officer charged in Mr. Nichols’s death, Tadarrius Bean, did not appear to have had any prior disciplinary issues since joining the department in 2020.

The disciplinary cases involving the use of force focused on whether the officers had appropriately reported the encounters; the hearings did not appear to examine whether the force had been appropriate.

	<p>The records show that the officers’ managers at times appeared at disciplinary hearings to praise the work of the officers. At Mr. Haley’s hearing, a lieutenant spoke on his behalf, saying he was “a hard-working officer” who “routinely makes good decisions.” At Mr. Martin’s hearing, records show, a lieutenant called him among the “top producers.”</p> <p>All five officers were fired this month after Mr. Nichols’s death. Video from his arrest on Jan. 7 showed officers kicking, pepper-spraying and punching him. He was taken to a hospital and died three days later.</p> <p>The officers were part of a dedicated “Scorpion” unit, established in 2021 to deploy in neighborhoods where the city had documented high rates of crime. The department has now <a href="#">disbanded the unit</a>, with police officials saying that the “heinous actions of a few” had cast a cloud of dishonor on the unit.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Recall: 52,000lbs sausage products</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/31/possible-listeria-contamination-leads-recall-more/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/31/possible-listeria-contamination-leads-recall-more/</a>
GIST	<p>Rhode Island-based food company Daniele International is recalling 52,914 pounds of ready-to-eat sausage products due to possible listeria exposure, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service has announced.</p> <p>The recalled meats were produced between May 23 and Nov. 25, 2022, and sold nationwide from Dec. 23, 2022, to Jan. 17, 2023. The following products are subject to recall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— 6-oz. plastic tray of “Frederik’s by meijer Spanish Style charcuterie sampler tray” with a sell-by date of 4/15/23.</li> <li>— 6-oz. plastic tray of “Boar’s Head Charcuterie Trio” with sell-by dates of 4/13/23, 4/14/23, and 4/15/23.</li> <li>— 7-oz. plastic tray of “Colameco’s Primo Naturale Genoa Uncured Salami” with a sell-by date of 12/23/23.</li> <li>— 7-oz. plastic tray of “Colameco’s Primo Naturale Black Pepper Uncured Salami” with use-by dates of 12/22/23, 12/30/23, and 1/17/24.</li> <li>— 1-lb. plastic tray of “Del Duca Sopressata, Coppa &amp; Genoa Salami” with sell-by dates of 4/13/23 and 4/14/23.</li> <li>— 1-lb. plastic tray of “Del Duca Calabrese, Prosciutto &amp; Coppa” with a sell-by date of 5/6/23.</li> <li>— 1-lb. plastic tray of “Del Duca Genoa Salami, Uncured Pepperoni &amp; Hard Salami” with a use-by date of 5/4/23.</li> <li>— 12-oz. plastic tray of “Gourmet Selection Sopressata, Capocollo, Hard Salami” with a sell-by date of 4/14/23.</li> </ul> <p>All recalled products can also be identified by the establishment number “EST.54” inside the USDA mark of inspection.</p> <p>The recall was initiated after FSIS found listeria on conveyor belts with which the meat products had contact. No reports of illness from consumers have been received thus far.</p> <p>“Obviously, we take this recall very seriously and we will be making adjustments to assure this issue doesn’t surface again,” Daniele International CEO Chris Bowler told the Providence Journal. “Providing food that is safe is a critical prerequisite and we employ an extensive food safety staff to make sure of it.”</p> <p>The equipment where the listeria was detected has since been fully cleansed and sterilized.</p> <p>Daniele International has not yet responded to a request for comment from The Washington Times.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 California cops kill ‘fleeing’ double-amputee</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/31/anthony-lowe-police-killing-amputee-huntington-park">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/31/anthony-lowe-police-killing-amputee-huntington-park</a>

A southern **California** police department is facing national backlash after footage revealed that officers fatally shot a double amputee and wheelchair user who appeared to be hobbling away on the ground before he was killed.

Anthony Lowe, 36, was killed by officers in Huntington Park, a city in southern Los Angeles county, last Thursday. Cellphone **footage** captured part of the incident, showing Lowe on a sidewalk next to his wheelchair appearing to try to flee as two officers approach him with weapons drawn. More police cars arrived as the officers followed Lowe, who seemed to be limping away, but the video did not capture the shooting.

Now, Lowe's family is calling for officers to be terminated and face murder charges.

"I'm heartbroken, and filled with anger and rage," Tatiana Jackson, his younger sister, told the Guardian on Tuesday. "I just can't understand why they would do that to someone in a wheelchair. I want somebody to explain to me what was the reason that you had to gun down a guy who has no legs."

Lowe was a father of two and one of eight siblings in a tight-knit family, and he'd been struggling recently after he had to have both legs amputated, his family said.

The circumstances preceding the killing are unclear, and officials have faced scrutiny as their narrative has appeared to shift. The Huntington Park police department said in a [statement](#) that officers were responding to reports of a stabbing allegedly committed by someone in a wheelchair at around 3.40pm on Thursday, and that they encountered Lowe, who was in a wheelchair and who they believed was the suspect.

The department claimed that officers attempted to detain him, alleging he ignored commands and "threatened to advance or throw the knife at the officers", although the limited witness footage did not capture this. The department further said that officers "deployed two separate Tasers in an attempt to subdue the suspect", but when "the Tasers were ineffective", they shot him. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The LA sheriff's department, which is investigating the killing, said in an initial [statement](#) that Lowe attempted to "throw the knife at the officers", but a spokesperson later [told the LA Times](#) that Lowe "did not throw the knife ultimately, but he made the motion multiple times over his head like he was going to throw the knife". The spokesperson also said that two officers had fired roughly 10 rounds at Lowe, who was hit in the torso. The Huntington Park department does not use body cameras.

The case comes amid [national protests](#) over police violence in the US following the [fatal beating](#) of [Tyre Nichols](#), 29, in Memphis. In Los Angeles, there have also been demonstrations this month over a [string of killings](#) by the LA police department, including the Tasing of Keenan Anderson, the cousin of a Black Lives Matter co-founder.

#### **'He was scared'**

Advocates and Lowe's family said the Huntington Park case illustrated how quickly police escalate situations and resort to lethal force. The video does not show any civilians near Lowe as he tries to hobble away, and he also appears to be at a distance from the officers.

Police have said that they found a stabbing victim who was taken to the hospital, but Lowe's family said they were skeptical of law enforcement's story.

"He was running away from them as if he was scared for his life," said Ebonique Simon, the mother of Anthony's son, who said that he might have had a knife on him for protection. "This could have been handled in any other way. But they chose gunfire as the resolution to the problem. That is insane ... The police are supposed to be upholding the law, and we're supposed to trust them with our lives, but how can we, if they do something like this?"

She said it seemed as if police were trying to present him as a violent and dangerous person so there would be less outrage: “They thought this man had no family and that they could sweep this story under the rug. But I’m not going to let it go until there is justice for my son.” Their son, who is 15, has been devastated by the footage, Simon said: “How is a child going to feel about police now that you’ve gunned their father down?”

Sylvester Ani, an LA activist who has helped families of people killed by police, said the case was a reminder that officers can create danger instead of protecting people: “The way they are trained to do the job is to kill people. That is not about safety. This man was a double amputee, but they felt the need to shoot him. They didn’t do that because they had to, they did that because they didn’t care about his life. Anthony should still be alive.”

The spokesperson for the LA sheriff’s agency, which has its own [track record of police violence and misconduct scandals](#), [told](#) the LA Times that the officers who fired at Lowe were on leave “for a few days”, would undergo a psychological evaluation and would be assigned to administrative duties until they were approved to return to fieldwork.

Cliff Smith, an organizer supporting Lowe’s family, said that statement suggested the sheriff’s agency had already exonerated the officers: “There can be no confidence in the sheriff’s department investigating any other police agency, because their own house is a mess.”

The sheriff’s department declined to comment, referring questions to the Huntington department, which did not respond to an inquiry on Tuesday.

#### **‘He brightened your day’**

Jackson, Lowe’s sister, who is 34, said that even though they were two years apart, they often felt like twins: “You could be having the worst day ever, but as soon as you come across him, he’d brighten your day. He was a family man who cared for all of his family and treated his friends like family.”

Jackson said her four-year-old daughter adored Lowe and didn’t understand that he was gone. Her daughter had noticed that her mother was in pain and had suggested she talk to Uncle Anthony to feel better: “She doesn’t understand why I’m crying. Anytime we’re going through something, my brother and I would call each other. And my daughter keeps saying, ‘Call Uncle Anthony.’ But he can’t fix this.”

The killing would have a ripple effect in the community, she added: “If we’re in danger, do you think these kids will call 911? They’re not going to, because they’re afraid.”

Lowe’s family said he had been living in Texas when his legs were amputated, but they did not know the specific circumstances. He had come back to California in recent months.

Simon said Lowe had been proud of their son’s success in football and had helped him stay motivated, and that she was struggling to process that he wouldn’t be there for graduation. She said Lowe had also loved to dance, and she believed he had been facing mental health challenges and depression due to the amputations. But she had hoped his life would soon start to improve.

He had recently been approved for prosthetics, she said, and had an appointment scheduled for February.

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HEADLINE	01/31 ORCA LIFT riders \$1 fare starts March 1 <sup>st</sup>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/1-fare-orca-lift-riders-starts-march-1/6EGI2KMKRBBMHLLSVRYDWPWD34/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/1-fare-orca-lift-riders-starts-march-1/6EGI2KMKRBBMHLLSVRYDWPWD34/</a>
GIST	On Tuesday, Sound Transit officially adopted the \$1 fare for <a href="#">ORCA LIFT riders</a> .  Starting March 1, 2023, ORCA LIFT riders will only have to pay \$1 for transportation.



“A person’s income should never be a barrier to traveling and accessing opportunities,” said Dow Constantine, Sound Transit Board Chair and King County Executive. “By formally adopting the \$1 ORCA LIFT fare, we continue to reduce cost burdens for transit-dependent riders. This change helps individual riders while contributing to healthier and stronger communities.”

ORCA LIFT cards are available to qualifying low-income households, seniors, and those with disabilities. See if you qualify [here](#).

Apply for a reduced fare card [here](#).

In May 2022, Sound Transit staff was given directions to spread the word about ORCA LIFT. ORCA LIFT enrollments in Pierce, King, and Snohomish counties increased by 22% and reached more than 53,000 active customers. Sound Transit’s goal is to reach 84,000 new customers.

“Sound Transit Fare Ambassadors are on our vehicles every day, educating passengers about reduced-fare programs like ORCA LIFT and the subsidized annual pass program we participate in with King County Metro,” said Sound Transit CEO Julie Timm. “We still have our work cut out for us to continue to reach deeper into the communities that would benefit the most from increased access to the resources essential for health and wellness, including health care, education, healthy food, and even the region’s stunning natural areas through more affordable transportation options.”

In 2022, Sound Transit gave out free fares to youth.

This new fare is expected to cost Sound Transit \$25 million through 2046.

Learn more about Sound Transit’s equitable fare engagement [here](#).

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Spokane frustration: police accountability</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/frustration-boils-city-community-members-police-accountability-spokane/293-11746d77-15ed-47ed-b806-1bb1a795a7c1">https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/frustration-boils-city-community-members-police-accountability-spokane/293-11746d77-15ed-47ed-b806-1bb1a795a7c1</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Following the death of George Floyd and a massive protest in downtown Spokane, Spokane City Leaders started meeting with groups to discuss police reform. During the last three years, they've had four roundtable discussions with a fifth scheduled this week. Instead, talked ended Tuesday morning on a bitter note.</p> <p>"We are disappointed and frustrated to be talking to you about a disruption we had today," Mayor Nadine Woodward said.</p> <p>Community members who participated in the discussions included representatives from the Spokane chapter of the NAACP, Police and Action Justice League of Spokane and Spokane County Against Racism. They said the city backed out of Tuesday's meeting when they learned the group wanted to share a critique of how the discussions had been going.</p> <p>"We decline to further participate in roundtable discussions with the City of Spokane regarding policy and public safety," pastor Walter Kendricks said.</p> <p>During two separate press conferences, city leaders and local activists said they're stepping away from the table.</p> <p>"You get tired of saying the same thing over and over and over. And nobody wants to listen, because they don't want to hear it. Because if they admit that they've heard it really hurt it, then they have to do something," Kendricks said, quoting the late civil rights activist Sandy Williams.</p>

	<p>Those demanding police reform said the meetings have been unproductive. They also claim city leaders never came to the table with an open mind and even asked people to sign a non-disclosure agreement.</p> <p>"People were very vulnerable in these conversations and to think that somebody could walk out of that meeting and then go share that publicly, why would people return to the round table?" Woodward said.</p> <p>Activists say there's also been no real progress.</p> <p>"After three long years, the policy proposals brought forth by council president Beggs in 2020 have not moved forward," Kendriks said.</p> <p>However, Spokane City Council President Breean Beggs said that many of the 24 proposed police reforms have been completely or partially achieved. Mayor Woodward says the process hasn't been perfect and some roundtable discussions were delayed or postponed during the pandemic, and two facilitators encountered serious health problems.</p> <p>"To our community, we hear you. We hear that public safety is your priority, and that you expect us to find the right balance between evolving policing and keeping safe from the drug, property and violent crime that is grinding in our city."</p> <p>Moving forward, the mayor and police say they will continue these conversations at the state level.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Deer as reservoir old coronavirus variants?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/health/coronavirus-variants-deer.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/health/coronavirus-variants-deer.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Alpha and Gamma variants of the coronavirus continued to circulate and evolve in white-tailed deer, even after they stopped spreading widely among people, <a href="#">a new study suggests</a>.</p> <p>Whether the variants are still circulating in deer remains unknown. "That's the big question," said Dr. Diego Diel, a virologist at Cornell University and an author of the study, which was published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on Tuesday.</p> <p>But the findings, which are based on samples collected through December 2021, provide more evidence that <a href="#">deer could be a reservoir of the virus</a> and a potential source of future variants, which could spill back into human populations.</p> <p>"It is a very large wildlife population in North America that has constant and very intense contact with humans," Dr. Diel said.</p> <p>Previous studies of deer have suggested humans have <a href="#">repeatedly introduced the coronavirus</a> into white-tailed deer populations in the United States and Canada and that deer can spread the virus to one another. Scientists are not sure how people are passing the virus to deer, but they have speculated that it might happen when people feed deer or deer encounter human trash or waste.</p> <p>The scale of the risk that infected deer pose to humans remains unclear. Scientists have documented <a href="#">one case that most likely resulted from deer-to-human transmission</a> in Ontario, and they note that hunters and others who have regular contact with the animals could potentially catch the virus from them.</p> <p>For the new study, Dr. Diel and his colleagues analyzed about 5,500 tissue samples collected from deer killed by hunters in New York State from September through December in the years 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>During the 2020 season, just 0.6 percent of the samples tested positive for the virus, a figure that rose to 21 percent during the 2021 season.</p> <p>Genetic sequencing revealed that three different variants of concern — Alpha, Gamma and Delta — were all present in deer during the 2021 season.</p>

At the time, Delta was still prevalent among New York’s human residents. But Alpha and Gamma had practically vanished, especially in the rural parts of the state where the infected deer were found.

The scientists also compared the genomic sequences of the viral samples they detected in deer to those that had been collected from humans. In the deer, all three variants had new mutations that set them apart from the human sequences. But the Alpha and Gamma samples from deer diverged more significantly from the human sequences than the Delta samples from deer did, the researchers found.

Together, the results suggested that Alpha and Gamma had likely been circulating among deer and accumulating new mutations for months after spilling over from the human population, experts said.

“It supports the argument that deer can sustain lineages or variants that are no longer circulating in humans,” said Dr. Suresh Kuchipudi, a veterinary microbiologist at Pennsylvania State University, who was not involved in the new research.

The finding not only raises concerns that deer could be a source of new coronavirus variants that could spread back to people; it also raises the possibility that the virus might evolve in ways that pose a greater risk to wild animals, he added. “It could also end up becoming an animal health problem,” Dr. Kuchipudi said.

The study highlights the need for ongoing surveillance of wild deer populations, Dr. Kuchipudi and Dr. Diel said. Dr. Diel and his colleagues are preparing to analyze deer samples from the 2022 hunting season to determine whether the virus remains widespread among deer and which variants may be circulating.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that deer hunters [take a variety of basic precautions](#) to reduce the risk of infection, including wearing masks while handling game and washing hands thoroughly afterward.

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HEADLINE	01/31 China Covid tsunami recedes: what next?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/asia/china-covid-infections-decrease.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/asia/china-covid-infections-decrease.html</a>
GIST	<p>When China abruptly abandoned “zero Covid,” accelerating an onslaught of infections and deaths, many feared a prolonged tide rippling from cities into villages. Now, two months later, the worst seems to have passed, and the government is eager to shift attention to economic recovery.</p> <p>Doctors who were mobilized across China to treat a rush of Covid patients say in phone interviews that the number of patients they are now seeing has fallen. Towns and villages that had hunkered down under the surge of infections and funerals are stirring to life. Health <a href="#">officials have declared</a> that Covid cases “already peaked in late December 2022.”</p> <p>“Now the pandemic is already being forgotten from people’s minds,” Gao Xiaobin, a doctor on the outskirts of a small city in Anhui Province in eastern China, said by telephone. “Nobody is wearing masks anywhere. That’s all gone.”</p> <p>The true toll of the outbreak is hard to delineate, with infections and deaths shrouded by censorship and poor data collection. Officially, <a href="#">China has reported</a> nearly 79,000 confirmed Covid-related deaths that occurred in hospitals since Dec. 8. But researchers say that is a drastic undercount because it excludes deaths outside hospitals.</p> <p>The Communist Party hopes to bustle past such questions and focus on reviving China’s economy, <a href="#">battered</a> by lockdowns. Restoring growth could help repair the image of its leader, Xi Jinping, bruised after three years of stringent “zero Covid” policies — which had largely contained the virus but strangled the economy — and then their abrupt, messy abandonment in December. His government’s</p>

standing will now rest heavily on whether it can create jobs, including for a large pool of unemployed youths and graduates.

Mr. Xi struck a positive note even as he has acknowledged that Covid outbreaks remain worrisome. “The dawn is just ahead,” he [told the country in a speech](#) on Jan. 20, shortly before the Lunar New Year holiday.

Provincial and city [leaders have declared](#), one after another, that infections have peaked in their areas. Some of China’s economic powerhouse regions have issued plans for restoring business confidence. Speaking about economic revitalization [last week to hundreds of officials](#), Huang Kunming, the Communist Party leader of Guangdong Province in southern China, did not mention the pandemic at all.

The government has sought to shape the public narrative about the outbreak by limiting information and censoring criticism of its response. Still, anger mounted over shortages of basic medicines and the government’s obfuscation of the death count from Covid while lines at funeral parlors grew and city morgues overflowed with bodies.

But for many Chinese people, the imperative to move past the pandemic and make a living in a hardscrabble society may, in the end, overshadow their grievances.

In phone calls to dozens of residents across China, many said they were more worried about finding work, rebuilding businesses and securing a future for their children.

“People don’t even talk about Covid anymore,” said Zhao Xuqian, 30, who said he lost his last job at a flour factory in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou and returned to his home village in Anhui Province. He was thinking about finding a new job in the coming weeks.

“The new year has started,” he said. “We should forget the past and face forward.”

Even as Chinese medical officials signaled that infections have been falling, they have also warned that the country remains vulnerable to fresh outbreaks, especially in rural areas where medical services are much scarcer than in cities.

“A new peak in infections could emerge in the areas that lack doctors and medicine, those — less than 10 percent nationwide — that have not completed the full vaccination round,” Gao Fu, a former director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told China Newsweek magazine earlier this month. “I still want to urge everyone to set aside the most important medical resources for the high-risk groups that are aged or have underlying illnesses.”

To limit the toll of any new outbreaks this year, China will also have to administer more vaccination jabs and booster shots, especially among the country’s older adults, and better equip hospitals to cope with patients who have not yet had Covid, several doctors and epidemiologists said.

The next wave may not be as massive, but it could concentrate its wrath on the vulnerable places and people that managed to avoid infection in the recent surge.

Some Chinese health officials [estimate that as much as 80 percent](#) of the country’s 1.4 billion people were infected in late 2022. (Other experts are skeptical of that estimate, saying that even with the swift transmissibility of the Omicron variant, it is unlikely that it could have infected so many people in such short order.)

“Future death projections will be partially determined by how well China could protect those who are of higher risks but are still hunkering down,” Xi Chen, an [associate professor](#) at the Yale School of Public Health who has monitored China’s Covid pandemic, wrote in emailed answers to questions.

Covid outbreaks in China multiplied late last year as the fast-spreading Omicron variant wore down armies of local officials enforcing lockdowns and travel restrictions. The surge grew into a tsunami after Mr. Xi lifted the pandemic restrictions, apparently shaken by protests across the country and the deepening economic slump.

What surprised some was how quickly Covid jumped to China's countryside. Like many doctors, Wang Guocai expected his village in southern China to be hit with infections some weeks after the Omicron subvariant swept big cities. Instead, the outbreak seemed to arrive in full force mere days after it inundated Guangzhou, the provincial capital nearly 200 miles away, he said.

At first it was mostly young people who lined up at his rural clinic. Many were migrant workers and businesspeople who had recently returned. Then growing numbers of villagers in their 60s, 70s and 80s crowded the clinic every day, Dr. Wang said in a telephone interview.

In December, he was seeing dozens of patients each day and handing out tablets for fevers and coughs, he said, but now he is seeing only several a day. He said he was relieved that his village appeared to have avoided deaths.

"Our village was lucky in that, to date, it hasn't had any fatal cases," Dr. Wang said. Other villages nearby were less fortunate, he said, though he said he was unclear about the precise number of deaths. "They were all patients who had quite serious existing conditions."

China's official death toll falls far short of initial projections by experts such as Bill Hanage, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He had earlier estimated that China's Covid eruption could cause 2 million deaths.

"I don't think we have any insight into what has actually happened, beyond the reasonable assumption that the true numbers are far larger than the official ones," Professor Hanage said.

Instead, Chinese people have built up a mosaic of impressions and stories about how their hometowns have fared.

Lu Xiaozhou, a writer from Hubei Province in central China, wrote online that 10 to 20 older residents had died in his home village of several thousand people during the recent Covid wave, and that "counts as very lucky." Li Jing, a farmer and former migrant worker from Yulin, a rural area of northwest China, said that even though his own family's older relatives survived the outbreak, other families were not as fortunate.

"There have been a lot of funerals in the county lately, I've seen them," he said by telephone. Asked about the future, he said: "Now I don't feel anything. I just want everything to go back to normal, that's all."

The resumption of normal life poses the risk of another surge of infections, especially after the one- or two-week-long Lunar New Year break, when many rural migrants who had traveled to their hometowns for family reunions start to return to cities. As people start moving again, so could the virus, and those who have avoided infection up to now may be exposed.

In the following months, the protection offered by recent vaccinations or immunity developed from infections will wear off, exposing people to renewed risks from Covid unless they receive more shots. There is also the potential danger of new subvariants, possibly less virulent but more transmissible.

"My other family members were all infected, but not me," Wang Xiaoyan, a resident of Ankang, a city in northwest China, said by telephone.

She said she had stayed in her own house and kept a distance from relatives returning to their home village in December. She only joined her extended family for Lunar New Year feasts of dumplings, stews and fish after the relatives among them who had Covid had recovered. Now she fretted about what might come next.

	“I’m worried — worried about getting infected,” she said. “I still wear a mask now, though basically nobody else does.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Ukraine: Russia gains using more troops</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#russia-owes-its-recent-gains-to-increased-troop-numbers-ukrainian-forces-say">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#russia-owes-its-recent-gains-to-increased-troop-numbers-ukrainian-forces-say</a>
GIST	<p>Firepower has been crucial in Russia’s gains in the war, but Ukrainian fighters and analysts say that Moscow has relied increasingly on a more crude tactic as its forces try to take the eastern city of Bakhmut: the sheer weight of troop numbers.</p> <p>Russian casualties in <a href="#">recent fighting in Bakhmut</a> have been higher than in previous months as commanders have poured soldiers into the battle, the Ukrainians said.</p> <p>The Kremlin is aiming for a significant victory after suffering battlefield setbacks in the south and northeast last fall and as both sides prepare for offensives in the coming weeks or months. Part of Russia’s evolving strategy, Ukrainian officials said, appears to be to overwhelm Ukrainian defenses with waves of soldiers.</p> <p>That would be a departure from Russia’s summer campaigns for Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk in Luhansk Province, in which artillery pounded the cities for weeks before Russia launched a sustained ground offensive.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia called up <a href="#">300,000 reservists</a> in September, boosting the army’s strength, even if the new soldiers are relatively inexperienced. Several Ukrainian fighters told reporters from The New York Times that while Kyiv’s forces appeared to be better trained, they were at times overwhelmed by the numbers ranged against them. It was not possible to confirm that independently, and the Russian authorities have not laid out specifically how they deploy their forces, or spoken of how many casualties they are willing to tolerate.</p> <p>Ukraine has also suffered heavy casualties in the battle for Bakhmut. It has mostly relied on national guard and other forces to hold its main defensive line in Bakhmut, with better-trained infantry units rushing in if those fighters are attacked or retreat.</p> <p>For each side, the capacity to sustain troop losses has guided the approach to the struggle over Bakhmut, according to Michael Kofman, the director of Russian studies at CNA, a research institute in Arlington, Va.</p> <p>The fight has cost Russia more in losses, because its fighters have often fought on foot, unsupported by armored vehicles, he said <a href="#">on a recent episode of the podcast War on the Rocks</a>, adding that many of them were recruited from prisons by the Wagner private military group, rather than being regular troops.</p> <p>The fight has also been costly for Ukraine, he said on the podcast. “Ukraine’s been forced to essentially trade higher quality troops to hold Bakhmut against expendable Russian forces,” he said, adding that the losses could “impede Ukrainian plans for an offensive down the line,” not least because the country no longer has an advantage in terms of overall troop numbers.</p> <p>The pitched battle over Bakhmut also suggests that Ukraine has overcome its qualms about engaging directly in a <a href="#">drawn-out fight for a city</a> and is prepared to sustain losses in the hope that it can deplete its enemy’s strength still further.</p>



	<p>In the coming weeks and months, Ukraine will be strengthened by defensive and offensive weapons, including tanks and rocket systems supplied by the United States and other allies, but for now the extra Russian troops give Moscow an advantage.</p> <p>“We understand the threats and challenges facing our country,” Ukraine’s head of the National Security and Defense Council, Oleksiy Danilov, said in televised remarks on Tuesday. “We are preparing for this very hard.”</p> <p>He said that half of the troops that Moscow mobilized recently had been sent to the front, while the others were training in Russia or Belarus. But Ukraine will be helped by the influx of support from Ukraine’s allies, he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 France steps up military aid to Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#france-caesar-howitzers-ukraine">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#france-caesar-howitzers-ukraine</a>
GIST	<p>PARIS — France will deliver 12 additional Caesar howitzers to Ukraine and step up efforts to train Ukrainian soldiers, the French defense minister <a href="#">announced</a> on Tuesday, a significant increase in military aid from a country that had recently <a href="#">shown reluctance</a> to part with more of <a href="#">the advanced artillery</a>.</p> <p>Sébastien Lecornu, the defense minister, said after a meeting in Paris with Oleksii Reznikov, his Ukrainian counterpart, that the 12 newly pledged French-made howitzers — which come in addition to 18 that have already been delivered <a href="#">and 19 being donated by Denmark</a> — would boost Ukraine’s artillery capabilities.</p> <p>“We now have a mass that is far from negligible,” Mr. Lecornu said.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have been pressing their cases for progressively more powerful weapons as the war has gone on, wearing down the resistance of Western officials who had expressed fear of escalating the war. Kyiv’s allies have begun to rush <a href="#">armored vehicles and other heavy weapons to the front</a>.</p> <p>France has already promised to send AMX-10 RCs, armored vehicles that are best suited to reconnaissance. The United States and Germany agreed last week to supply advanced battle tanks, but while Paris has not ruled out delivering its flagship tank, the Leclerc, it has argued that it is less suitable for Ukraine’s use.</p> <p>France’s announcement on Tuesday was a marked step-up in aid. The 18 howitzers already delivered account for roughly 20 percent of France’s existing artillery. (Mr. Lecornu noted that one of the Caesar howitzers already in the field in Ukraine was currently out of commission.)</p> <p>Mr. Lecornu said the new pledge was possible because Nexter, the French company that manufactures the Caesar, was “increasing its production capabilities.” He did not provide a timeline for delivery.</p> <p>France is aiming to train 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers on French soil by this summer, he said, and would send 150 army staff members to Poland by the end of February with the goal of training up to 600 Ukrainians soldiers there every month.</p> <p>A top adviser to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine suggested on Monday that Kyiv had begun pressing NATO countries on the question of warplanes, <a href="#">saying on Telegram</a> that Kyiv had received “positive signals” from Poland about F-16 fighter jets. Mr. Lecornu and Mr. Reznikov said they discussed fighter jets, but no specific demands or proposals were made.</p> <p>“The topic is not taboo,” Mr. Lecornu said.</p> <p>Mr. Reznikov, who was on his first official visit to France, said he was “optimistic” as he listed all of the weapons that the West had previously said were off the table.</p>

	<p>“I don’t know how quick it will be, this response from the Western allies,” Mr. Reznikov said. “But you know that one year ago, when I was in Washington D.C., I asked about Stingers, and the answer was: ‘It’s impossible, Oleksii.’ And now it has become possible.”</p> <p>Mr. Lecornu said the two ministers had also discussed training Ukrainian pilots on French fighter jets, but said that no decision had been made.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Iran, Russia to link banking systems</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#iran-russia-banks">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/31/world/russia-ukraine-news#iran-russia-banks</a>
GIST	<p>Iran and Russia have taken a step toward integrating their banking systems, according to a senior Iranian official, in a move that would expand collaboration between Tehran and Moscow as they try to work around Western sanctions that have thwarted both countries’ access to foreign capital.</p> <p>Mohsen Karimi, the deputy governor of Iran’s central bank, <a href="#">told Fars</a>, the semiofficial Iranian news agency, on Monday that Iranian banks could now rely on Russian bank messaging services, allowing them to make international transactions while bypassing much of the global banking establishment.</p> <p>Tough economic sanctions imposed by Western countries have disconnected banks in both countries from SWIFT, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, <a href="#">a Belgian messaging service</a> that links more than 11,000 financial institutions around the world. The system is critical for cross-border payments, allowing international banks and financial companies to transmit payment instructions and alert each other to transactions before they happen.</p> <p>“We have connected the national banking messaging network of the two countries and we no longer need SWIFT,” Mr. Karimi told Fars in an interview, adding that the system would connect about 700 Russian banks with 106 banks from at least 13 other countries.</p> <p>Representatives from Russia’s central bank, which has not yet confirmed the agreement, are set to arrive in Iran in a few days to finalize details, he said.</p> <p><a href="#">SWIFT cut ties with Iranian banks</a> in 2018, after then President Donald J. Trump <a href="#">pulled out</a> of the 2015 nuclear agreement and reimposed sanctions on Tehran. The Biden administration imposed fresh sanctions on Tehran in recent months, after <a href="#">nationwide demonstrations</a> in Iran were met with a brutal crackdown.</p> <p>Some Russian banks were similarly <a href="#">cut off from the SWIFT system</a> following Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year.</p> <p>“We’re seeing two pariah states trying to find ways in which they can help each other in what can be perceived as a common threat to both of them,” said Michael Parker, a former U.S. federal prosecutor who now heads the anti-money-laundering and sanctions practice at the Washington-based law firm Ferrari &amp; Associates. “When you push state actors away from the core into the periphery, it’s only logical that they will find each other.”</p> <p>The move toward integrating banking systems seems to signal that Iran and Russia may be solidifying ties that Western officials have described as an alliance of convenience. The Biden administration warned last year that Russia and Iran were strengthening their military links into a <a href="#">“full-fledged defense partnership.”</a></p> <p>Linking their banking systems will allow Tehran and Moscow to share their experiences operating under sanctions programs, which “are tailored to two different perceived threats” and do not apply uniformly to both countries or financial systems, Mr. Parker said.</p> <p>The financial sanctions on Russia — which some call <a href="#">the most extensive</a> in modern history — have eroded its economy and curbed its post-Soviet efforts to modernize along Western lines. Crippling sanctions in</p>

	<p>Iran have similarly cut off its access to international markets, decimating its economy and its currency, which in recent months has fallen about 30 percent, a historic low.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has historically approached deepening ties to Iran with caution, but his calculus has changed as his war with Ukraine has frozen Russia out of Western markets. Moscow is now increasingly looking to Tehran as an economic partner to help alleviate some of the effects of Western sanctions.</p> <p>“Iran has spent years honing its craft to blunt the impact of much more comprehensive sanctions programs that have been leveled against it and its economy,” said Mr. Parker. “Russia, in turn, has a much more robust and modern banking system that has not been fully shut out of the global economy just yet.”</p> <p>The agreement this week was mentioned in October by a Russian trade representative, who said that the new banking system could be operational within a few months, <a href="#">according to Tass</a>, the Russian state-run news agency.</p> <p>The executive director of the Russian Association of the Crypto Industry and Blockchain, Alexander Brazhnikov, <a href="#">told a Russian newspaper earlier</a> this month that it was working with Iran to launch a joint cryptocurrency. The collaboration has the potential to further mitigate the effects of Western sanctions by allowing both countries to conduct transactions outside the international banking system with countries willing to trade in digital currency.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 DOJ probes Amazon: safety hazards</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/doj-probes-amazon-for-alleged-knowledge-of-warehouse-safety-hazards/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/doj-probes-amazon-for-alleged-knowledge-of-warehouse-safety-hazards/</a>
GIST	<p>After years of scrutiny over working conditions inside Amazon’s warehouses, federal prosecutors are asking whether Amazon executives knew about safety hazards and misled others about the company’s safety record.</p> <p>Attorneys with the Department of Justice’s civil division are investigating whether Amazon “engaged in a fraudulent scheme designed to hide the true number of injuries” to its workers, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York. They also seek to determine if Amazon made “false representations” to lenders about its safety record to obtain credit, the attorney’s office said.</p> <p>Amazon spokesperson Kelly Nantel said the company disagrees with the allegations.</p> <p>But government officials have asked the company to produce copies of communications and other documents, and to make several executives available for depositions. Information gained in the investigation, the Justice Department says, could provide “significant evidence” about the severity of ergonomic hazards at Amazon’s warehouses and “Amazon’s longstanding knowledge of those hazards,” according to court documents.</p> <p>Inside Amazon’s warehouses, workers say they have to move quickly to meet high expectations the company sets for packing items and moving orders out of the warehouse and onto customers’ doorsteps. Repetitive motions, like lifting, bending and reaching, put workers at risk of musculoskeletal disorders, according to inspections from Washington’s Department of Labor in 2021.</p> <p>Amazon says it does not set productivity requirements for its workers, but warehouse staff say they fear losing their job if they don’t move fast enough.</p> <p>Now, government officials say recent investigations have “revealed that many of Amazon’s policies and practices are determined at the corporate level,” according to court documents.</p>

Amazon has asked a district judge in Seattle to allow the company more time to gather the information the attorney's office requested. Prosecutors originally asked for a Jan. 6 deadline. Amazon asked for a six-month extension.

On Monday, Judge Michelle Peterson told Amazon to produce documents on a rolling basis. Attorneys for both sides are expected to return to court in April.

### **Further scrutiny**

The investigation is unfolding at the same time that workplace safety watchdogs in Washington and at the federal level are looking at conditions inside Amazon's warehouses.

Regulators with the Washington state Department of Labor and Industries have cited and fined Amazon four times — for a total of \$81,000 — for alleged violations of workplace safety laws. State safety officials accused the company of setting an unsafe pace that puts employees at risk as they quickly move package after package. Amazon has appealed those citations.

The national Occupational Safety and Health Administration began its inspections this summer. It opened investigations at facilities in Deltona, Florida; Waukegan, Illinois; and New Windsor, New York, in July. Then, in August, it opened investigations at facilities in Aurora, Colorado; Nampa, Idaho; and Castleton, New York.

The department has already issued some citations. It said in December that Amazon had failed to properly record work-related injuries at the six warehouses. In January, it cited the company for failing to keep workers safe at three warehouses.

Warehouse workers are at high risk for lower-back injuries and musculoskeletal disorders because of awkward postures, long reaches and long hours — among other reasons, the department found.

Amazon faces more than \$60,000 in proposed penalties. The company plans to appeal the citations and says it is already working to mitigate risks.

"We take the safety and health of our employees very seriously, and we strongly disagree with these allegations and intend to appeal," Nantel, the Amazon spokesperson, said in an emailed statement. "We know there will always be ways for us to improve even further, and we will — we'll never stop working to be safer for our employees."

### **Requested information**

In the slew of ongoing investigations, OSHA and the Justice Department are asking for similar information from Amazon. Because of that, representatives from both government agencies are arguing Amazon should be able to move faster. OSHA faces a ticking clock; federal law requires OSHA to submit citations from its investigation within six months of the violation.

Following those criteria, OSHA would need to complete its investigations in February. On Monday, Judge Peterson pushed back that deadline, allowing Amazon more time to submit requested documents and OSHA more time to review that new information before closing its inspections.

Amazon is arguing the government has set an unreasonable timeline and expected pace of work for its attorneys. The company said it has produced more than 46,200 documents — totaling nearly 190,000 pages — and 22 witnesses for depositions, according to a January court filing. Amazon also said it has "mobilized" 100 attorneys and spent millions of dollars already.

In addition, Amazon said the government has set search terms that are too broad, slowing the process. One parameter was so broad it ended up searching some employees' inboxes for weather reports and confirmation emails from United Airlines, an attorney for Amazon said at Monday's hearing.

	<p>The government is arguing it has to move fast to protect workers clocking in at Amazon warehouses each day. The U.S. attorney's investigation is looking into information from the six facilities OSHA is inspecting as well as more than 900 "sibling" facilities nationwide.</p> <p>Despite producing hundreds of thousands of pages of documents, Amazon has still withheld between 50% to 70% of requested documents for further review, representatives for the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Department of Labor wrote in a January court filing.</p> <p>The information "must be provided in a timely manner — rather than in many months — so that OSHA can take appropriate action to protect the safety of Amazon's workers," the representatives wrote in an earlier court document. "The critical worker safety issues at stake in this matter warrant expedited production."</p> <p>The attorney's office has asked for documents and communications from "high-ranking" executives, including Amazon's global medical director, the director of record-keeping, the director of workplace health and safety initiatives and audits, and the director of global workplace health and safety ergonomics.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York could not be reached for comment.</p> <p>The Justice Department inquiry relies on a 1989 law that focuses on savings and loans, called the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery and Enforcement Act, or FIRREA. Amazon wrote in a December court filing it was a "stretch" to use FIRREA for this investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 EPA blocks Alaska Pebble Mine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/epa-blocks-alaska-pebble-mine-in-salmon-rich-bristol-bay-region/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/epa-blocks-alaska-pebble-mine-in-salmon-rich-bristol-bay-region/</a>
GIST	<p>The Environmental Protection Agency has blocked development of the Pebble Mine project in a corner of the Bristol Bay watershed, a vast and pristine swath of southwest Alaska that sustains the greatest sockeye salmon runs on the planet.</p> <p>The EPA decision made public Tuesday placed a key portion of land surrounding the Pebble deposit off-limits for use as a disposal site.</p> <p>The decision follows years of legal jousting and regulatory twists and turns for the mine in what emerged as an epic Alaska resource battle. It could still continue as developers are likely to challenge the EPA decision in federal court.</p> <p>The project proposed by The Pebble Limited Partnership ignited passionate opposition from a coalition of Alaska and Northwest fishers, environmentalists and many Bristol Bay region natives who fear the salmon resource would be undermined by an open pit mine forecast to yield 1.3 billion tons of ore over two decades of operations.</p> <p>"This is fantastic news," said Harry Moore, a lifelong Bristol Bay fisher. "Science prevailed. People prevailed and more importantly salmon prevailed." Moore, largely raised in Seattle and residing in Alaska, joined in protests against the mine in a grassroots organizing effort.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Pebble Limited Partnership</a>, a subsidiary of Canada-based Northern Dynasty Ltd., calls the Bristol Bay deposit "one of the greatest stores of mineral wealth ever discovered," including gold, copper, silver and molybdenum. Partnership officials have argued the mine could tap into mineral deposits needed for the transition to cleaner forms of energy, boosting the Alaska economy without harming salmon.</p> <p>In a statement, John Shively, CEO of The Pebble Partnership, blasted the EPA action as unlawful and unprecedented.</p>

“This preemptive action against Pebble is not supported legally, technically or environmentally,” Shively said. “As such, the next step will likely be to take legal action to fight against this injustice.”

The EPA, in the project determination made Monday, found that discharges resulting from mine’s 20-year development plan would have unacceptable and adverse effects on certain areas within the Bristol Bay watershed.

“The final action demonstrates the Biden-Harris administration’s commitment to safeguarding our nation’s indispensable natural resources and protecting the livelihood of those who depend on the health and well-being of these magnificent waters,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a news conference Monday.

Alannah Hurley, executive director of the United Tribes of Bristol Bay, also took part in the conference. “From the beginning of this battle almost 20 years ago, our people have stood strong against the threat of the Pebble Mine,” said Hurley, who called the EPA action “historic progress” that honors “the nation-to-nation relationship with our tribal governments.”

The EPA’s decision puts a zone around the Pebble deposit that is off-limits to disposal of rock, soils or other materials. It also designates a bigger area as restricted, where the EPA could opt to nix disposal plans from Pebble or other potential mine sites located near that deposit.

The decision was based on a [December recommendation](#) from Seattle-based regional administrator Casey Sixkiller.

The Seattle EPA regional office, in a document detailing the [recommendation](#), stated that the mine discharges would result in losses and changes to 8.5 miles of streams used by salmon and another 91 miles of waterways that support the salmon streams as well as 2,108 acres of wetlands and other waters.

The mine project would include a 270-megawatt power plant, milling and processing facilities, and a water treatment plant. The EPA regional office found it was “reasonably foreseeable” that the mine would eventually be expanded and continue operations for more than 78 years.

“These would represent extraordinary and unprecedented levels of anadromous fish habitat losses and degradation, dramatically expanding the unacceptable adverse effects identified in the 2020 plan,” the document stated.

Once the mine closed, long-term water management and monitoring would need to last for centuries, the document stated.

The Pebble deposit is in an area that straddles the Nushagak and Kvichak drainages, two of the most productive drainages for Bristol Bay sockeye salmon that last year stormed back from saltwater rearing grounds in record numbers.

The salmon spawn in a huge expanse of lakes, streams and rivers, with their offspring rearing in freshwater before heading out to sea to forage for food. The commercial fishery generated more than \$350 million in 2022, and the EPA cited a study that put the total economic value to the nation of the bay’s salmon resources, including subsistence and recreation uses, at more than \$2.2 billion.

In Congress, Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., emerged as a vocal mine opponent who urged the Obama administration to use the Clean Water Act to block the mine. Cantwell, in an interview, called this one of the biggest environmental battles of her Senate career.

Washington fishers hold more than 700 permits to harvest salmon from Bristol Bay, and many of Alaska’s processors are based in Seattle. But Cantwell said she initially got a lot of pushback from those who thought this was Alaska’s business, not hers.



“In the early days, we had to show people why there was such concern and impact in what the mine could do,” Cantwell said. “We just went to Ballard, I don’t know how many times. We kept holding news conferences with ... fishing industry people.”

In 2014, the EPA’s Seattle office first proposed putting areas off-limits to mine-waste disposal under section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act, which triggered a lawsuit from the mine developers that halted the process.

In 2019, during the Trump administration, the EPA withdrew that proposal. That spurred legal action from 20 environmental, tribal and fishing groups and resulted in the EPA reconsidering the prohibition on mine-waste disposal.

The EPA decision this week follows another blow to Pebble development announced in December.

After a \$20 million fundraising effort, The Conservation Fund and the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust [secured permanent protection](#) for more than 44,000 acres in the Bristol Bay drainage through easements. These easements include an area where the Pebble Mine Partnership had proposed a transportation route.

“I am never going to say when you are talking about this project that you are at the end of the road, but we do believe that this, in combination with the 404(c) decision, would make it extremely difficult to do,” said Tim Troll, executive director of the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust.

The easements were granted by the Pedro Bay Corporation, which was vested with Bristol Bay drainage land through the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Dennis McLerran, who served as EPA regional administrator in Seattle from 2011 to 2017, said the EPA’s action was vindication of work done by the agency during the Obama administration.

If Pebble was permitted, McLerran said, it would set the stage for other projects to move forward.

“It would be death by a thousand cuts. You would have a lot of smaller mine projects that would be developed,” said McLerran, a Port Ludlow resident who works for Cascadia Law Group.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 WA car insurance premiums to creep up</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/car-insurance-premiums-in-wa-to-creep-up-commissioner-warns/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/car-insurance-premiums-in-wa-to-creep-up-commissioner-warns/</a>
GIST	<p>Car insurance premiums are set to increase this year, though Washington drivers will be spared the brunt of it, according to the Washington Office of the Insurance Commissioner.</p> <p>After years of little or no increases, car insurance premiums rose a whopping 8.4% nationwide in 2022. In Washington, that increase was closer to 2%, according to <a href="#">a report</a> by LendingTree’s Value Penguin.</p> <p>The report is forecasting that the average annual cost for car insurance in 2023 will be \$1,536 in Washington, which is around 14% lower than forecast nationally. Washington ranks 34th in the U.S. for car insurance premiums.</p> <p>Insurance for new electric vehicles will be 28% higher across the country and in Washington, and drivers with traffic violations will see a 56% increase on average for car insurance.</p> <p>According to the office of Washington Insurance Commissioner, there are several factors pushing rates up, including higher used-car prices, rising medical costs after car collisions, higher fatality rates, increased costs to repair newer and more sophisticated vehicles and longer wait times for repairs due to supply chain issues.</p>

	<p>Here are some tips from the state insurance office on how to <a href="#">lower your car insurance premiums</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shop around online to see if premiums would be lower at another company. You can check to see that they are licensed in Washington by visiting <a href="#">st.news/WAinsurance</a>.</li> <li>• If you're buying a car, check the premiums before finalizing the deal. Premiums can vary between types of cars.</li> <li>• Choose a plan with a higher deductible.</li> <li>• While liability coverage is required in Washington, collision coverage is not. If you have a low-value car and can afford to fix it yourself after an accident, collision coverage may not be worth it.</li> <li>• Ask your insurance agent if you get any common discounts for airbags, automatic seatbelts, anti-lock brakes, anti-theft devices, good driving records or total mileage driven.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Changes emerge as Covid emergency ends</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/how-will-life-change-once-the-covid-19-emergency-ends/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/how-will-life-change-once-the-covid-19-emergency-ends/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The declaration of a COVID-19 public health emergency three years ago changed the lives of millions of Americans by offering increased health care coverage, beefed-up food assistance and universal access to coronavirus vaccines and tests.</p> <p>Much of that is now coming to an end, with President Joe Biden's administration saying it plans to end the emergency declarations on May 11.</p> <p>Here's a look at what will stay and what will go once the emergency order is lifted:</p> <p><b>COVID-19 TESTS, TREATMENTS AND VACCINES</b></p> <p>The at-home nasal swabs, COVID-19 vaccines as well as their accompanying boosters, treatments and other products that scientists have developed over the last three years will still be authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration once the public health emergency is over.</p> <p>But how much people pay for certain COVID-related products may change.</p> <p>Insurers will no longer be required to cover the cost of free at-home COVID-19 tests.</p> <p>Free vaccines, however, won't come to an end with the public health emergency.</p> <p>"There's no one right now who cannot get a free vaccine or booster," said Cynthia Cox, vice president at Kaiser Family Foundation. "Right now all the vaccines that are being administered are still the ones purchased by the federal government."</p> <p>But the Biden administration has said it is running out of money to buy up vaccines and Congress has not budged on the president's requests for more funding.</p> <p>Many states expect they can make it through the spring and summer, but there are questions around what their vaccine supply will look like going into the fall — when respiratory illness typically start to spike, said Anne Zink, the president of the The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.</p> <p>"We're all anxious to find out more about that," Zink said.</p> <p><b>MEDICAID</b></p> <p>Medicaid enrollment ballooned during the pandemic, in part because the federal government prohibited states from removing people from the program during the public health emergency once they had enrolled.</p> <p>The program offers health care coverage to roughly 90 million children and adults — or 1 out of every 4 Americans.</p>

Late last year, Congress told states they could start removing ineligible people in April. Millions of people are expected to lose their coverage, either because they now make too much money to qualify for Medicare or they've moved. Many are expected to be eligible for low-cost insurance plans through the Affordable Care Act's private marketplace or their employer.

## STUDENT LOANS

Payments on federal student loans were halted in March 2020 under the Trump administration and have been on hold since. The Biden administration announced a plan to forgive up to \$10,000 in federal student loan debts for individuals with incomes of less than \$125,000 or households with incomes under \$250,000.

But that forgiveness plan — which more than 26 million people have applied for — is on pause, thrown into legal limbo while awaiting a ruling from the Supreme Court.

The Justice Department initially argued that the Secretary of Education has “sweeping authority” to waive rules relating to student financial aid during a national emergency, per the 2003 HEROES Act that was adopted during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A Biden administration official told The Associated Press Tuesday that ending the health emergencies will not change the legal argument for student loan debt cancellation, saying the COVID-19 pandemic affected millions of student borrowers who might have fallen behind on their loans during the emergency.

The pause on student loan payments is expected to end 60 days after the Supreme Court ruling.

## IMMIGRATION AT THE BORDER

Border officials will still be able to deny people the right to seek asylum, a rule that was introduced in March 2020 as COVID-19 began its spread.

Those restrictions remain in place at the U.S.-Mexico border, pending a Supreme Court review, regardless of the COVID-19 emergency's expiration. Republican lawmakers sued after the Biden administration moved to end the restrictions, known as Title 42, last year. The Supreme Court kept the restrictions in place in December until it can weigh the arguments.

The end of the emergency may bolster the legal argument that the Title 42 restrictions should no longer be in place. The emergency restrictions fell under health regulations and have been criticized as a way to keep migrants from coming to the border, rather than to stop the spread of the virus.

## TELEHEALTH

COVID-19's arrival rapidly accelerated the use of telehealth, with many providers and hospital systems shifting their delivery of care to a smartphone or computer format.

The public health emergency declaration helped hasten that approach because it suspended some of the strict rules that had previously governed telehealth and allowed doctors to bill Medicare for care delivered virtually, encouraging hospital systems to invest more heavily in telehealth systems.

Congress has already agreed to extend many of those telehealth flexibilities for Medicare through the end of next year.

## FOOD ASSISTANCE

Relaxed rules during the COVID-19 public health emergency made it easier for individuals and families to receive a boost in benefits under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Some state and congressional action has started to wind down some of that. Emergency allotments — typically about \$82 a month, according to the Food Research and Action Center — will come to an end as soon as March in more than two dozen states.

Food help for unemployed adults, under the age of 50 and without children, will also change after the public health emergency is lifted in May. During the emergency declaration, a rule that required those individuals to work or participate in job training for 20 hours per week to remain eligible for SNAP benefits was suspended. That rule will be in place again starting in June. SNAP aid for more low-income college students will also draw down in June.

#### STATE COVID EMERGENCIES

At least a half-dozen states — including California, Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Texas — have some form of COVID emergency declaration or disaster order still in place. But those orders have limited practical effect.

New Mexico's public health emergency, which has been extended through Friday, advised health care facilities to abide by federal coronavirus requirements. Delaware has continued to operate under a "public health emergency," which has suspended staffing ratios in long-term care facilities.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, has said his emergency order will end Feb. 28. Newsom has issued 596 specific orders, from stay-at-home mandates to tax-filing extensions, during the pandemic. Most have expired, but he plans to ask lawmakers make two into permanent laws — one letting nurses order and dispense COVID-19 medication and another allowing lab workers to solely process coronavirus tests.

#### MONEY FOR HOSPITALS

Hospitals will take a big financial hit in May, when the emergency comes to an end. They'll no longer get an extra 20% for treating COVID-19 patients who are on Medicare.

The end to those payments comes at a time when many hospitals are under financial pressure, struggling with workforce shortages and dealing with the pain of inflation, said Stacey Hughes, the executive vice president at the American Hospitals Association.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Impasse: Colorado River water deadline</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/states-at-impasse-as-colorado-river-water-deadline-arrives-pressure-builds-on-california/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/states-at-impasse-as-colorado-river-water-deadline-arrives-pressure-builds-on-california/</a>
GIST	<p>The seven states that depend on the Colorado River have missed a Jan. 31 federal deadline for reaching a regionwide consensus on how to sharply reduce water use, raising the likelihood of more friction as the West grapples with how to take less supplies from the shrinking river.</p> <p>In a bid to sway the process after contentious negotiations reached an impasse, six of the seven states gave the federal government a last-minute proposal outlining possible water cuts to help prevent reservoirs from falling to dangerously low levels, presenting a unified front while leaving out California, which uses the single largest share of the river.</p> <p>The six states — Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — called their proposal a "consensus-based modeling alternative" that could serve as a framework for negotiating a solution. They submitted the proposal to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation ahead of an end-of-January deadline that federal water officials had set for the states to present a consensus proposal.</p>

A large portion of the proposed water cuts would involve accounting for evaporation and other water losses in the river's Lower Basin, a change that would translate into large reductions for California, and which the state's water officials have opposed.

In announcing the proposal Monday, water officials acknowledged that it was not an official agreement between the basin states. Instead, Tom Buschatzke, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, called the proposal a key step in the "ongoing dialogue" among the seven states "as we continue to seek a collaborative solution to stabilize the Colorado River system."

John Entsminger, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, said that "while our goal remains achieving a seven-state agreement, developing and submitting this consensus-based alternative is a positive step forward" as federal officials carry out an expedited review to revise the current rules for dealing with the shortage.

Federal officials told the region's water managers at a mid-December conference that they will weigh immediate options to protect water levels in depleted reservoirs this year, and that the region must be prepared for the river to permanently yield less water because of climate change.

Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the country's two largest reservoirs, are now about three-fourths empty. The river, which supplies cities, farming areas and tribal nations from Wyoming to the U.S.-Mexico border, has been pushed to a breaking point by chronic overuse, years of drought and global warming.

Nevada presented a proposal to the federal government last month that, among various measures, included starting to account for the water lost to evaporation from reservoirs and along the river in the three Lower Basin states of California, Arizona and Nevada.

But the latest talks in Denver last week ended with the states still at an impasse, said Bart Fisher, president of California's Palo Verde Irrigation District board.

"It's become combative and adversarial, rather than collaborative toward a consensus," Fisher said. "Nobody wants their own ox to be gored. And so it's become, everyone's backed into their respective corners, and focused on the largest target, which is California."

Fisher and other California officials said they were working on a separate proposal that they planned to submit to the federal government.

California water managers and farmers have said those with lower-priority junior water rights, such as Arizona's cities, should be in line for larger cuts first.

Farm landowners in the Imperial Valley, who hold senior water rights and use the single-largest share of the river's water, have said they are willing to cut back in exchange for compensation, but they argue the water-rights priority system should be upheld and respected.

"Other states are trying to advantage themselves by urging the federal government to disregard existing law and perform some reallocation of the river that would benefit themselves, as an alternative to collaborating toward a common consensus," Fisher said.

Fisher and others who manage California water agencies acknowledge that the river is in a severe water deficit.

"In the situation that we face today, of course, the river is overallocated," Fisher said. "We must adjust demand to fit supply."

Federal officials in June called for the seven states to come up with plans to drastically reduce water diversions by 2 million to 4 million acre-feet per year, a reduction of roughly 15% to 25%. But negotiations among the states grew tense and acrimonious and didn't produce a deal.

In October, the Biden administration announced plans to revise the current rules for dealing with shortages and pursue a new agreement to achieve larger reductions in water use. Interior Department officials have said they will consider alternatives for reductions in their review and may need to significantly reduce the amount of water releases from Glen Canyon Dam, where water levels have been sinking closer to a point at which the dam could no longer generate power.

So far, four California water districts — the Imperial Irrigation District, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Palo Verde Irrigation District and Coachella Valley Water District — have proposed to reduce water use by up to 400,000 acre-feet per year. That would amount to about 9% of the state's total water allotment from the river for the next four years, through 2026.

But politicians and officials in other states have called for California water agencies to make larger water reductions.

Rep. Greg Stanton, D-Ariz., directed strong words at California while urging the Bureau of Reclamation to consider the six-state proposal.

“The depletion of the Colorado River is a slow-moving natural disaster — one that threatens the livelihoods of 40 million people across seven basin states,” Stanton said. “While many of the states have worked together to reach an agreement that works for everyone, California refuses to do its part.”

Stanton urged the Bureau of Reclamation to act on the proposal and said, “We cannot wait any longer.”

Officials representing the six states said their proposal is not a formal agreement but is an “alternative framework” for the Bureau of Reclamation to consider as part of its review process while preparing what is called a supplemental environmental impact statement.

They said the proposal would help protect water deliveries and hydropower production, and would reduce the risks of reservoirs declining to “dead pool,” a point at which water would no longer flow downstream.

The proposal outlines reductions for Arizona, California and Nevada beyond those the three states have agreed to previously. It calls for accounting for more than 1.5 million acre-feet of water losses, primarily caused by evaporation, which would translate into the large reductions.

The proposal also calls for implementing various efforts in the four Upper Basin states — Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico — including “additional voluntary conservation measures.”

This approach “appropriately distributes the burden” across the Colorado River Basin, said Becky Mitchell, director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Brenda Burman, general manager of the Central Arizona Project, said the region needs to move on a “path forward to lay the groundwork for finding durable long-term solutions.”

“We have a lot more to do and this is a critical next step,” Burman said.

Adel Hagekhalil, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District, said California water managers have worked with their counterparts over the past two months to “produce a consensus-based alternative”

“While we were not able to reach agreement among all seven states on an alternative,” Hagekhalil said, “we were in agreement on the reductions that need to be modeled.”

He said the main stumbling block was “requiring the cuts to be allocated and assigned to contractors and states prematurely, prior to the modeling results.”



“Nevertheless, we will continue working hard, building on these recent efforts, to develop a consensus-based approach to addressing the drought conditions on the Colorado River,” Hagekhalil said in an email. “California recognized many years ago the impacts that climate change would have on this important water supply and has made significant investments to be more efficient.”

While focusing on negotiating immediate water reductions, the seven states also need to begin talks on new rules for managing shortages after 2026, when the current guidelines expire.

“We must do everything we can to finalize realistic and tenable solutions that can be immediately implemented over the next three years,” Hagekhalil said, “so that we can turn our collective focus to working even harder to develop long-term, post-2026 solutions for lasting sustainability on the Colorado River.”

The task of reaching an agreement is complicated by the overlapping needs to handle the emergency of managing very low reservoirs while also preparing to negotiate long-term rules for after 2026, said Elizabeth Koebele, an associate professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Reno.

“I think states haven’t wanted to say, ‘We’ll give up X amount of water,’ and show their cards on that, because my hunch is that that sort of sets the precedent for what they might be able to give up post-2026,” Koebele said. “That makes this so challenging, because we’re trying to kind of put out the fire as we’re also thinking about long-term sustainability.”

Koebele said she thinks many observers expected either a seven-state plan or nothing, but what has emerged so far is a proposal minus California that will hold less weight or persuasive power.

“Reclamation is less likely to push for strong adoption of an alternative only six states agreed to because they will face litigation from California,” Koebele said.

She said that doesn’t mean the six-state proposal is worthless, though. She said it’s both strategic and substantive.

“It puts hard numbers on what the other basin states expect California to cut, which is frankly a lot of water right away,” Koebele said. “It puts the ball in California’s court to respond.”

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HEADLINE	01/31 Seattle Fire: historic number OD calls
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-fire-department-responding-historic-number-overdose-calls/CSYAHQPONRG3LJKMV5HYQKJZ2Y/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-fire-department-responding-historic-number-overdose-calls/CSYAHQPONRG3LJKMV5HYQKJZ2Y/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle Fire Department has responded to a historic number of overdose calls in recent memory.</p> <p>The department said it has responded to more than 5,200 overdose calls in the last 12 months. It also shared links to the health department and resources to help people beat addiction.</p> <p><b>Public Health — Seattle and King County</b> shared this statement on the alarming numbers: <i>Since 2019, the number of overdose deaths in King County has grown exponentially, jumping by over 40% between 2021 and 2022. The pervasiveness of inexpensive and dangerous fentanyl has led to a rise in fatal overdoses across all sectors of society in King County and across America</i></p> <p><i>The underlying root causes that have resulted in the current overdose crisis are, unfortunately, not ones that will be reversed overnight. Structural factors, including lack of economic opportunities, social isolation, structural racism, criminalization of substance use disorders, housing stability, and stigma, are just some of the factors that will require long-term, systematic changes and resources at all levels, from federal to state to local.</i></p> <p>— Sharon Bogan, Communications Specialist</p>

The news of the historic number of overdoses has drawn a lot of concern from many people.

“It’s a situation that seems hopeless, and that is not a good way to feel,” said a woman named Angela.

Kristen Neil has worked in downtown Seattle for over 20 years and said she believes the problem of people overdosing has worsened.

“It’s flooded on the streets. It’s all you see every day when you walk up the street,” Neil said.

Neil has also had to make calls to 911 because of people passed out in front of her work.

“Like walking out the door and having to call and watching somebody do chest compressions on someone else. You know, it’s kind of hard,” Neil said.

Though the rise in overdoses is alarming, there are resources throughout the Emerald City to help people. Besides the health department, [Peer Seattle](#), an LGBTQ support group, also helps those struggling with addiction and on the road to recovery.

Christopher Archiopoli with the group says while he isn’t shocked about the number of calls Seattle Fire responded to, he believes people should always have Narcan on hand to help out during a crisis.

“I think that Narcan is a medicine, and it should be treated that way. It’s to help people get through something,” Archiopoli said. “Helping people to understand that if someone is experiencing substance use disorder, someone living with addiction that they are still human.”

Recovering addicts at Peer Seattle tell KIRO 7 they’ve even had to administer Narcan to those overdosing on the streets recently.

“So I walked over as another man was on the phone with the paramedics at the same time. So, we worked together to resuscitate this man,” said one woman.

They also believe groups like this are vital in helping people.

“But without these drugs and community outreach, I couldn’t have the life I have today or the future that I have today,” a woman told KIRO 7.

Besides medicine and organizations set to help, many believe it will take a community effort to put a potential end to the opioid epidemic.

“They deserve our compassion. They deserve our love, and they deserve to be accepted in our society,” Archiopoli said.

“So, if we kind of start with one, we can also see what else we need to do in the long run,” Neil said.

“But money doesn’t solve the crisis within one’s soul,” Angela said.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Iran quiet rebellion replaces street protests
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-protests-hijab-11675177547?mod=hp_lead_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-protests-hijab-11675177547?mod=hp_lead_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>Four months after a nationwide uprising erupted in <a href="#">Iran</a>, a lethal <a href="#">crackdown</a> and an ailing economy have quieted antigovernment street demonstrations.</p> <p>Students still occasionally gather at universities and high schools, and others shout slogans from city rooftops and balconies. But <a href="#">organized protests</a> have largely tapered off. Those still willing to demonstrate gather in small groups, scattered around Tehran and other cities with little coordination.</p>

Crowds of demonstrators have instead given way to a quieter form of rebellion. Thousands of women in Tehran now walk outdoors without the compulsory headscarf, or hijab. It is a form of civil disobedience unlikely to topple the regime but which many say will be difficult to contain in the future.

Similar embers of discontent continue to smolder over the government's refusal to consider protester grievances, according to activists, and demonstrations could flare up again.

The protests began in mid-September, set off by the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict [Islamic dress code](#). Demands for greater freedom quickly escalated into calls for the overthrow of the clerical leadership, in one of the biggest challenges to the Islamic Republic since its founding four decades ago.

The government, initially caught by surprise, rebounded with deadly force. Hundreds of protesters have been blinded by rubber bullets and metal pellets in street clashes. Thousands have been arrested, some by police using electronic surveillance, including data from ride-hailing apps, to detain people after they returned from rallies. At least 16 people have been sentenced to death for their role in the protests. Four have been executed. Rights groups estimate that more than 500 protesters have been killed.

As the prospects for ousting Iran's clerical rulers shrink, fewer people are willing to risk their lives to try.

"Many Iranians have come to the conclusion that the regime isn't viable, but they have not come to the conclusion that this revolt is viable," said Peyman Jafari, a historian of Iran's social history and assistant professor at The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

That has left the protest movement without enough popular support to carry out national strikes or mass demonstrations, the kind of disruptions that could lead to the toppling of Iran's leadership, said academics, Western diplomats and activists.

Yet protests, which have become more frequent in the past decade, are likely to continue, driven by a younger, more secular generation of Iranians who increasingly outnumber the aging vanguard of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The protesters' challenge of laws requiring women to wear a hijab is a swipe at one of the ideological pillars of the Islamic Republic.

Demonstrators, rallying around the slogan "woman, life, freedom," have stomped on pictures of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and evicted officials from their schools, brazen acts for any Iranian, regardless of gender.

Iranian authorities this month ordered police to issue fines to women who break the country's female dress code, as well as impose penalties on taxis and restaurants that allow women to enter without a hijab. So far, it has had little effect.

In one measure of Iran's secular turn, support for the hijab has fallen from 85% after the 1979 Islamic Revolution to around 35%, according to a 2018 survey by the Iranian Parliament's research center.

For some Iranian women, the experience of the past months has marked a point of no return. A protester in her 30s said she had become accustomed to walking around Tehran without a hijab. The experience, she said, made her realize how she had been conditioned to accept the regime's commands.

"Seeing how this law has been used to oppress women has meant that it has no legal value for me anymore," she said. "I won't say that I'm not afraid anymore. But the least I can do is demonstrate against the system, and show solidarity with others by not covering my hair."

The antigovernment movement hasn't settled on a political platform with the potential to unite Iranians. Millions oppose the Islamic Republic but are split over what should replace it.

According to a poll in March last year by Gamaan, an independent research group based in the Netherlands, 34% of Iranians in the survey, including men and women, said they would prefer to live in a secular republic; 22% preferred an Islamic republic; 19% wanted a constitutional monarchy.

One protester said that in the protests' early days in Tehran she tried to build solidarity by handing out homemade decorative pins with "woman, life, freedom" written in calligraphy. "I wanted to create unity with the pins, to communicate with those who were angry like I was," she said. She is among many who have since abandoned street rallies out of fear of arrest and violence.

### **Food, freedom**

Inflation and Iran's plummeting currency have exacerbated an economic crisis that makes it difficult to sustain the antigovernment movement and expand popular support, according to economists and protesters.

Economic hardship can spur demonstrations, "but a durable challenge to the regime requires the mobilization of resources like money, skills, and time," said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, founder of the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a U.K.-based nonprofit think tank focused on Iranian economy and policy.

"It is more difficult for individuals to provide those resources to the movement if they are facing acute economic hardship," he said.

Workers, merchants and business owners have been among the hardest hit by Iran's economic troubles. They make up the same groups that protesters would need to trigger a change in Iran's leadership, according to political analysts.

"People are stressed about how to feed their children, and they don't have time to think about protests," said an activist in Tehran who works as a translator.

The national currency, the rial, has lost around 30% of its value since mid-September, plummeting to a historic low last week of 450,000 to the dollar on the open market. Inflation topped 40% for the fourth year in a row.

Many of Iran's economic travails stem from years of mismanagement and corruption. U.S. sanctions also have curbed crucial exports, including oil.

The recent currency slide started after international negotiations to revive a nuclear deal that would have lifted sanctions stalled over the summer. It accelerated when the government imposed internet restrictions during the protests. The effort to stifle dissent hurt private businesses and the services industry, which account for more than half of Iran's national output.

Internet shutdowns by authorities cost Iran an estimated \$773 million last year, according to Top 10 VPN, a website researching internet censorship. About 11 million Iranian jobs depend on social-media apps like Instagram, according to the Statistical Center of Iran.

Protests and clashes with security forces also have scared away foreign visitors. The owner of a tourism agency in Tehran said all incoming tours since September have been canceled after other countries warned against travel to Iran. "Not even during the Covid pandemic did we experience such a drop," he said.

### **Diaspora divide**

Iran's clerical leadership came to power in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. At the time, the economy was growing. An oil embargo by the Arab members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries that targeted supporters of Israel during the Yom Kippur War drove crude prices sky high.

Bolstered by a feeling of economic power, shopkeepers and unions in Iran joined with protesters in a yearlong uprising that ended the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

In 2009, hundreds of thousands of Iranians demonstrated against alleged election fraud, in what became known as the Green Movement.

The movement, largely made up of the urban middle-class Iranians and students, eventually fell to government forces. It didn't attract support from lower-income and working-class Iranians, who became the driving force in short-lived protests over economic hardships in 2017 and 2019. Those protests, in turn, failed to attract much support among urban middle-class Iranians.

During the current demonstrations, oil workers have gone on strike for better wages and working conditions, but they haven't joined forces with those seeking a regime change.

A student who joined in antigovernment protests from the first day said the movement needs leaders and structure, "Just being in the street isn't enough," she said.

The 1979 revolution largely succeeded because millions of Iranians of different political persuasions coalesced around one leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was in exile in France at the time. There is no similar leader now, complicating any effort at building a political group to rival the current government.

Iranians abroad are divided over how the West should engage with Iran. One side supports diplomacy, such as the 2015 international nuclear deal, as well as sanctions relief. Opponents say such measures only prolong the Islamic Republic. They support sanctions, as well as severance of diplomatic ties and the closing of Western embassies in Tehran.

Since September, the rifts have deepened. Iranian lobbyists, journalists and analysts in the U.S. and Europe who support diplomacy have received death threats and had their personal information disclosed online. Chicago University received a bomb threat last fall against an Iranian journalist, prompting a panel discussion about the protests to be held online instead of in person.

One figure who has attracted support from Iranians abroad on social media is Reza Pahlavi, the U.S.-based son of the deposed shah. Still others oppose the return to a monarchy.

As a result of the divisions, the most organized opposition party outside Iran is the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, or MeK. The militant group has little support in the country over its support of Iraq's Saddam Hussein during his eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians died in the war. MeK had been listed as a terrorist organization in the U.S. until 2012.

Many Iranian protesters say those living abroad don't understand the depth of their plight—caught between economic stresses and the risk of injury, arrest and government execution.

"Many people say that if they get killed in the protest," the student protester said, "their family will die of hunger."

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HEADLINE	01/31 Interpol: 100yrs int'l police cooperation
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2023/INTERPOL-marks-100-years-of-international-police-cooperation">https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2023/INTERPOL-marks-100-years-of-international-police-cooperation</a>
GIST	<p>LYON, FRANCE: The world's largest policing organization is officially marking its 100-year anniversary, celebrating a century of international police cooperation.</p> <p>The International Criminal Police Commission, as INTERPOL was originally called, was founded in 1923 at a police congress in Vienna, Austria that brought together <a href="#">representatives from 20 countries</a>.</p>

Taking place in a post-war context of geopolitical upheaval and concerns of rising international crime, representatives agreed that only through collaboration could police combat transnational crime threats – a goal shared throughout periods of political or economic tension.

Convened directly by police officials, the Vienna Congress established the foundational principles that continue to guide INTERPOL's work today: a focus on practical tools to help law enforcement fight crime beyond their borders and a commitment to neutrality.

"While the world has undergone profound transformations in the past century, INTERPOL's founding principles are as relevant in today's context as they were back in 1923," Secretary General Jürgen Stock said.

"The tools and technologies we use to support police in our member countries have of course developed dramatically – from telegraphic codes to I-24/7, our secure police network; from fingerprints to facial recognition.

"Today, we are again in a period of global disruption fueled by ever-increasing digitalization and geopolitical flux. The need for robust international police cooperation is stronger than ever," added Secretary General Stock.

A short [video released by INTERPOL](#) to mark its 100-year anniversary highlights the breadth of issues the Organization's work now encompasses – including environmental crime, illicit trade in pharmaceuticals and forensic analysis – turning the vision of a small group in 1920s Vienna into a sweeping multi-generational mission.

### **250 searches per second**

Over the past century, INTERPOL has become one of the most widely recognized organizations in the world, though its exact role is sometimes less well understood.

Far from pop culture images of 'INTERPOL agents' swooping into various countries as a sort of supranational police force, the reality is that powers of arrest and seizure remain solely with national law enforcement.

Rather, INTERPOL allows police to address crime that extends beyond their national borders by sharing and accessing data across the Organization's 195 member countries, as well as leveraging a range of technical and operational support.

Today's context, where crime is more global than ever before and criminals increasingly operate in 'borderless' online spaces, has furthered INTERPOL's operational relevance to law enforcement.

On average, police search INTERPOL databases more than 20 million times a day – 250 searches per second.

### **Return to Vienna**

Throughout the year, the INTERPOL General Secretariat and its member countries will host events and launch activities to commemorate the anniversary.

The centennial events will culminate in Vienna as the city once again plays host to INTERPOL, welcoming police leaders from 195 countries for the Organization's 91st General Assembly.

2023 will also mark the first year that the world celebrates the United Nations (UN)-designated [International Day of Police Cooperation](#) set on 7 September, the day the International Criminal Police Commission was established.



Adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2022, the UN day recognizes the central role played by the world's law enforcement community in global security and the need to further strengthen international cooperation to prevent and combat transnational crime and terrorism.

Read more about [INTERPOL's 100-year history on our website](#) and follow us on social media to learn more about the Organization's past, present and future.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Tacoma warned of active tuberculosis case</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271848862.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271848862.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department reports it is monitoring an active case of tuberculosis in Tacoma.</p> <p>The female patient “has declined to take medication,” the department said in a news release Monday.</p> <p>“We are working with her and her family to try to persuade her to get the treatment she needs to help cure the TB so she can protect herself and others,” the department added.</p> <p>“Most people we contact are happy to get the treatment they need,” said Nigel Turner, division director of Communicable Disease Control, in a statement. “Occasionally people refuse treatment and isolation. When that happens, we take steps to help keep the community safe.”</p> <p>Because of the risk of spread, TPCHD has “the legal authority to seek a court order to persuade patients to comply,” the department said in its release, though those incidents are rare, Turner noted.</p> <p>A court can order home confinement or isolation in jail if a patient refuses to comply.</p> <p>Turner told FOX 13 TV that the department has only had to pursue legal avenues in TB cases three times in the past two decades.</p> <p>In 2015, King County health officials obtained a court order to detain a potentially contagious person who did not comply with a full round of TB treatment after taking initial medication doses, according to The Seattle Times. In that case, the patient was confined to electronic-home detention to receive daily treatment after not following through with the prescribed nine-month directly observed therapy by a health worker for each dose.</p> <p>State law requires health care providers to report all cases of active TB to the health department.</p> <p>“Our staff works with all patients who have active TB to make sure they get treatment to cure the disease,” the department stated.</p> <p>According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, TB is spread through the air “when someone who is sick with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, speaks, laughs, sings or sneezes.”</p> <p>TB can be spread to others “spending extended time with a contagious person in a closed space,” according to the department.</p> <p>The county sees about 20 cases of active TB each year, TPCHD said, with the state averaging about 200 cases a year.</p> <p>The disease usually affects a person's lungs but can happen in other parts of the body, such as the kidneys, brain or spine, according to the CDC.</p>

	<p>Symptoms of TB in the lungs can include coughing as well as coughs producing blood, chest pain, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Missed medication dosing can raise the risk of drug-resistant strains.</p> <p>Untreated active TB “will result in death,” TPCHD said Monday. “People with active, untreated infections are contagious and represent a risk to the community.”</p> <p>An active case is when someone has symptoms and is contagious, as opposed to latent TB, diagnosed when someone tests positive but shows no symptoms with inactive TB germs.</p> <p>TB is curable with medication given over a period of time.</p> <p>Patients with active TB are typically isolated at home and monitored regularly by health officials to ensure proper medical dosing to completion.</p> <p>Latent TB treatment, which does not require isolation, also calls for medication to prevent any future disease activation, with periodic medical check-ins and blood tests to monitor liver function.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Boeing bids farewell to aviation icon</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/boeing-bids-farewell-to-an-icon-delivers-last-17753016.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/boeing-bids-farewell-to-an-icon-delivers-last-17753016.php</a> <a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/the-queen-of-the-skies-boeing-says-goodbye-to-the-747">https://www.q13fox.com/news/the-queen-of-the-skies-boeing-says-goodbye-to-the-747</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — Boeing bids farewell to an icon on Tuesday: It’s delivering its final 747 jumbo jet.</p> <p>Since its first flight in 1969, the giant yet graceful 747 has served as a cargo plane, a commercial aircraft capable of carrying nearly 500 passengers, a transport for NASA's space shuttles, and the Air Force One presidential aircraft. It revolutionized travel, connecting international cities that had never before had direct routes and helping democratize passenger flight.</p> <p>But over about the past 15 years, Boeing and its European rival Airbus have introduced more profitable and fuel efficient wide-body planes, with only two engines to maintain instead of the 747’s four. The final plane is the 1,574th built by Boeing in the Puget Sound region of Washington state.</p> <p>A big crowd of current and former Boeing workers is expected for the final send-off. The last one is being delivered to cargo carrier Atlas Air.</p> <p>“If you love this business, you’ve been dreading this moment,” said longtime aviation analyst Richard Aboulafia. “Nobody wants a four-engine airliner anymore, but that doesn’t erase the tremendous contribution the aircraft made to the development of the industry or its remarkable legacy.”</p> <p>Boeing set out to build the 747 after losing a contract for a huge military transport, the C-5A. The idea was to take advantage of the new engines developed for the transport — high-bypass turbofan engines, which burned less fuel by passing air around the engine core, enabling a farther flight range — and to use them for a newly imagined civilian aircraft.</p> <p>It took more than 50,000 Boeing workers less than 16 months to churn out the first 747 — a Herculean effort that earned them the nickname, “The Incredibles.” The jumbo jet's production required the construction of a massive factory in Everett, north of Seattle — the world's largest building by volume.</p> <p>Among those in attendance on Tuesday was Desi Evans, 92, who joined Boeing at its factory in Renton, south of Seattle, in 1957 and went on to spend 38 years at the company before retiring. One day in 1967, his boss told him he'd be joining the 747 program in Everett — the next morning.</p> <p>“They told me, ‘Wear rubber boots, a hard hat and dress warm, because it's a sea of mud,’” Evans recalled. “And it was — they were getting ready for the erection of the factory.”</p>

He was assigned as a supervisor to help figure out how the interior of the passenger cabin would be installed and later oversaw crews that worked on sealing and painting the planes.

“When that very first 747 rolled out, it was an incredible time,” he said as he stood before the last plane, parked outside the factory. “You felt elated — like you're making history. You're part of something big, and it's still big, even if this is the last one.”

The plane's fuselage was 225 feet (68.5 meters) long and the tail stood as tall as a six-story building. The plane's design included a second deck extending from the cockpit back over the first third of the plane, giving it a distinctive hump and inspiring a nickname, the Whale. More romantically, the 747 became known as the Queen of the Skies.

Some airlines turned the second deck into a first-class cocktail lounge, while even the lower deck sometimes featured lounges or even a piano bar. One decommissioned 747, originally built for Singapore Airlines in 1976, has been converted into a 33-room hotel near the airport in Stockholm.

“It was the first big carrier, the first widebody, so it set a new standard for airlines to figure out what to do with it, and how to fill it,” said Guillaume de Syon, a history professor at Pennsylvania's Albright College who specializes in aviation and mobility. “It became the essence of mass air travel: You couldn't fill it with people paying full price, so you need to lower prices to get people onboard. It contributed to what happened in the late 1970s with the deregulation of air travel.”

The first 747 entered service in 1970 on Pan Am's New York-London route, and its timing was terrible, Aboulafia said. It debuted shortly before the oil crisis of 1973, amid a recession that saw Boeing's employment fall from 100,800 employees in 1967 to a low of 38,690 in April 1971. The “Boeing bust” was infamously marked by a billboard near the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport that read, “Will the last person leaving SEATTLE -- Turn out the lights.”

An updated model — the 747-400 series — arrived in the late 1980s and had much better timing, coinciding with the Asian economic boom of the early 1990s, Aboulafia said. He recalled taking a Cathay Pacific 747 from Los Angeles to Hong Kong as a twentysomething backpacker in 1991.

“Even people like me could go see Asia,” Aboulafia said. “Before, you had to stop for fuel in Alaska or Hawaii and it cost a lot more. This was a straight shot — and reasonably priced.”

Delta was the last U.S. airline to use the 747 for passenger flights, which ended in 2017, although some other international carriers continue to fly it, including the German airline Lufthansa.

Atlas Air ordered four 747-8 freighters early last year, with the final one leaving the factory Tuesday.

Boeing's roots are in the Seattle area, and it has assembly plants in Washington state and South Carolina. The company announced in May that it would move its headquarters from Chicago to Arlington, Virginia, putting its executives closer to key federal government officials and the Federal Aviation Administration, which certifies Boeing passenger and cargo planes.

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EVERETT, Wash. - Looking up at the gigantic 747 outside the assembly line at [Boeing's](#) Everett plant, Alisa Amber had a smile on her face. Looking back at her: the image of her grandfather, the head of the design team that created the aircraft, Joe Sutter.

"I grew up assuming everyone had someone in their life that changed the world," Amber said, noting how she didn't understand her grandpa's impact until much later. "I really just wanted to see Papa on the side."

Sutter's image, the lone reference to Boeing on the exterior, the rest was wrapped for its final client: Atlas Air.

Leadership at Boeing unveiled the plane at a large event on Tuesday afternoon. Roughly 5,000 people were in attendance, including John Travolta—the narrator who leapt onto stage at the end telling the crowd he couldn't miss the event.

Travolta, a pilot in addition to his acting accolades, told the crowd he was lucky enough to learn the pilot the 747 in Seattle.

"There's nothing like seeing a 747 take flight," he said, as a crowd gave him a thunderous applause.

The final flight will be something to behold. A Boeing executive noted that when the plane left Everett from Paine Field on Wednesday it would create a pattern of a crown with the numbers "747."

"It was exciting, it was new and it was so much bigger than anything we'd worked on," said Fred Diener, one of the 'Incredibles,' flown in for the unveiling.

The 'Incredibles' was the name given to the people working on the first-ever 747. According to Boeing, the production of the first-ever 747 began in 1967 and involved roughly 50,000 individuals from construction workers, mechanics, engineers, secretaries and administrators.

Diener was a manager. He oversaw planes from start to finish. He was in his 20s when the program began. Now in his 80s, he told FOX 13 News he wasn't sure he'd fly in for the event. He was glad he did.

"Hard to not be a part of it," he said. "The better part of my career was working on the 747."

So much has changed since then. While the building that housed the 747 operation was the largest ever built, it was one of just three buildings at the time. Diener said the freeway didn't even exist yet.

"I remember that," he said with a laugh. "Oh, it was a big thing."

"It's nice to see the 'Incredibles,' being remembered as the people who did this," said Amber. "That's what Papa would have wanted. It was never me. It was the team. They were the 'Incredibles.' It was never I did this, it was always the 'Incredibles.'"

#### FUN FACTS:

- The production of the 747 spanned 55 years with a total of 1,574 airplanes built for more than 100 customers
- The maximum take-off weight of a current 747-8 is almost one million pounds
- A single wing of a 747-8 could accommodate four 1,375 square foot homes
- NASA modified two 747-100s to move its space shuttles

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HEADLINE	01/31 Nigeria faces hardship: cash shortage
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/nigerias-push-redesigned-currency-creates-cash-shortage-96783987">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/nigerias-push-redesigned-currency-creates-cash-shortage-96783987</a>
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria -- Nigeria's push to replace its paper money with newly designed currency notes has created a shortage of cash, leaving people unable to buy what they need and forcing businesses to close across the West African nation, experts and business groups said.</p> <p>The Central Bank of Nigeria says the redesigned denominations of 200 (43 U.S. cents), 500 (\$1.08) and 1,000 naira (\$2.17) notes and new limits on large cash withdrawals would help curb money laundering and make digital payments the norm in Africa's biggest economy.</p>

But the process to replace the old currency notes is “rushed,” and commercial banks don't have enough new cash to give to customers, pushing demand higher than supply, said Ayokunle Olubunmi with Nigeria’s main ratings agency, Agosto and Co.

The central bank “doesn’t want us to be spending cash; they want us to be doing transactions electronically, but you can’t legislate a change in behavior,” Olubunmi said. “You have to make people see reasons and ensure those channels are reliable.”

The government is pushing for a cashless economy that is more inclusive and says the changes will drive economic growth. Critics are skeptical, pointing to decades of chronic corruption in which government officials are known to loot public funds and create more hardship for the many struggling with poverty.

As of October, more than 80% of the 3.2 trillion naira (\$7.2 billion) in circulation in Nigeria was in private hands, but 75% of that has now been deposited with financial institutions, the central bank governor, Godwin Emefiele, said over the weekend.

He extended the deadline for Nigerians to deposit their old banknotes by 10 days, to Feb. 10.

Even as more Nigerians deposit old currency in banks, The Associated Press found some financial institutions were still issuing the outdated notes to customers as of Monday. Bank customers told the AP that they are allowed to withdraw very little cash and face high bank charges for each transaction.

Digital payments run by banks are often unreliable in Nigeria, leaving businesses struggling as growing numbers of customers have been unable to find the cash to pay for goods and services. The situation has created a parallel market for people to illegally sell the new banknotes, the Nigeria secret police said Monday.

“Someone might want to transfer funds to you, but it can’t be processed and they don’t have cash because of this issue,” said Chima Ekwueme, who sells car parts in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. “Sometimes, I ask them to drop my goods and go and find money anywhere.”

The cash supply crisis has disrupted such sales across the country, forcing a good number of businesses to shut down, said Muda Yusuf, head of the Nigeria Center for Promotion of Private Enterprise.

“The two critical sectors of the economy — trade and commerce as well as agriculture — have been very badly affected because they do a lot of transactions in cash, especially in rural areas,” Yusuf said. “This policy has brought their economic activities to a halt.”

Authorities should allow more time for the old notes to be gradually replaced by the new ones, he said.

“To make matters worse, the supply is extremely limited. Economic activities have been practically crippled as some people have locked their shops,” Yusuf added.

Nigerian authorities said the redesigned banknotes and new withdrawal limits would help curb the use of money to influence the Feb. 25 presidential election, though experts argue the currency changes are being done at the expense of most Nigerians. They're already facing inflation of 21.3%, a 37% increase in the rate in a year.

“All these together are causing significant hardship in both rural and urban areas, (and) the hardship for people is merely collateral damage to the political class,” said Tunde Ajileye, a partner at Lagos-based SBM Intelligence firm.

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HEADLINE	01/31 DOJ scrutiny: child welfare algorithm
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/child-welfare-algorithm-faces-justice-department-scrutiny-96805948">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/child-welfare-algorithm-faces-justice-department-scrutiny-96805948</a>

PITTSBURGH -- The Justice Department has been scrutinizing a controversial artificial intelligence tool used by a Pittsburgh-area child protective services agency following concerns that the tool could lead to discrimination against families with disabilities, The Associated Press has learned.

The interest from federal civil rights attorneys comes after an AP investigation revealed potential bias and transparency issues surrounding the increasing use of algorithms within the troubled child welfare system in the U.S. While some see such opaque tools as a promising way to help overwhelmed social workers predict which children may face harm, others say their reliance on historical data risks automating past inequalities.

Several civil rights complaints were filed in the fall about the Allegheny Family Screening Tool, which is used to help social workers decide which families to investigate, AP has learned. The pioneering AI program is designed to assess a family's risk level when they are reported for child welfare concerns in Allegheny County.

Two sources said that attorneys in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division cited the AP investigation when urging them to submit formal complaints detailing their concerns about how the algorithm could harden bias against people with disabilities, including families with mental health issues.

A third person told AP that the same group of federal civil rights attorneys also spoke with them in November as part of a broad conversation about how algorithmic tools could potentially exacerbate disparities, including for people with disabilities. That conversation explored the design and construction of Allegheny's influential algorithm, though the full scope of the Justice Department's interest is unknown.

All three sources spoke to AP on the condition of anonymity, saying the Justice Department asked them not to discuss the confidential conversations. Two said they also feared professional retaliation.

Wyn Hornbuckle, a Justice Department spokesman, declined to comment.

Algorithms use pools of information to turn data points into predictions, whether that's for online shopping, identifying crime hotspots or hiring workers. Many agencies in the U.S. are considering adopting such tools as part of their work with children and families.

Though there's been widespread debate over the moral consequences of using artificial intelligence in child protective services, the Justice Department's interest in the Allegheny algorithm marks a significant turn toward possible legal implications.

Robin Frank, a veteran family law attorney in Pittsburgh and vocal critic of the Allegheny algorithm, said she also filed a complaint with the Justice Department in October on behalf of a client with an intellectual disability who is fighting to get his daughter back from foster care. The AP obtained a copy of the complaint, which raised concerns about how the Allegheny Family Screening Tool assesses a family's risk.

"I think it's important for people to be aware of what their rights are and to the extent that we don't have a lot of information when there seemingly are valid questions about the algorithm, it's important to have some oversight," Frank said.

Mark Bertolet, spokesman for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, said by email that the agency had not heard from the Justice Department and declined interview requests.

"We are not aware of any concerns about the inclusion of these variables from research groups' past evaluation or community feedback on the (Allegheny Family Screening Tool)," the county said, describing previous studies and outreach regarding the tool.

Child protective services workers can face critiques from all sides. They are assigned blame for both over-surveillance and not giving enough support to the families who land in their view. The system has long been criticized for disproportionately separating Black, poor, disabled and marginalized families and for insufficiently addressing – let alone eradicating – child abuse and deaths.

Supporters see algorithms as a data-driven solution to make the system both more thorough and efficient, saying child welfare officials should use all tools at their disposal to make sure children aren't maltreated.

Critics worry that delegating some of that critical work to AI tools powered by data collected largely from people who are poor can bake in discrimination against families based on race, income, disabilities or other external characteristics.

The AP's previous story highlighted data points used by the algorithm that can be interpreted as proxies for race. Now, federal civil rights attorneys have been considering the tool's potential impacts on people with disabilities.

The Allegheny Family Screening Tool was specifically designed to predict the risk that a child will be placed in foster care in the two years after the family is investigated. The county said its algorithm has used data points tied to disabilities in children, parents and other members of local households because they can help predict the risk that a child will be removed from their home after a maltreatment report. The county added that it has updated its algorithm several times and has sometimes removed disabilities-related data points.

Using a trove of detailed personal data and birth, Medicaid, substance abuse, mental health, jail and probation records, among other government data sets, the Allegheny tool's statistical calculations help social workers decide which families should be investigated for neglect – a nuanced term that can include everything from inadequate housing to poor hygiene, but is a different category from physical or sexual abuse, which is investigated separately in Pennsylvania and is not subject to the algorithm.

The algorithm-generated risk score on its own doesn't determine what happens in the case. A child welfare investigation can result in vulnerable families receiving more support and services, but it can also lead to the removal of children for foster care and ultimately, the termination of parental rights.

The county has said that algorithms provide a scientific check on call center workers' personal biases. County officials further underscored that hotline workers determine what happens with a family's case and can always override the tool's recommendations. The tool is also only applied to the beginning of a family's potential involvement with the child-welfare process; a different social worker conducts the investigations afterward.

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, which can include a wide spectrum of conditions, from diabetes, cancer and hearing loss to intellectual disabilities and mental and behavioral health diagnosis like ADHD, depression and schizophrenia.

The National Council on Disability has noted that a high rate of parents with disabilities receive public benefits including food stamps, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income, a Social Security Administration program that provides monthly payments to adults and children with a disability.

Allegheny's algorithm, in use since 2016, has at times drawn from data related to Supplemental Security Income as well as diagnoses for mental, behavioral and neurodevelopmental disorders, including schizophrenia or mood disorders, AP found.

The county said that when the disabilities data is included, it "is predictive of the outcomes" and "it should come as no surprise that parents with disabilities ... may also have a need for additional supports and services." The county added that there are other risk assessment programs that use data about mental health and other conditions that may affect a parent's ability to safely care for a child.



Emily Putnam-Hornstein and Rhema Vaithianathan, the two developers of Allegheny’s algorithm and other tools like it, deferred to Allegheny County’s answers about the algorithm’s inner workings. They said in an email that they were unaware of any Justice Department scrutiny relating to the algorithm.

The AP obtained records showing hundreds of specific variables that are used to calculate the risk scores for families who are reported to child protective services, including the public data that powers the Allegheny algorithm and similar tools deployed in child welfare systems elsewhere in the U.S.

The AP’s analysis of Allegheny’s algorithm and those inspired by it in Los Angeles County, California, Douglas County, Colorado, and in Oregon reveals a range of controversial data points that have measured people with low incomes and other disadvantaged demographics, at times evaluating families on race, zip code, disabilities and their use of public welfare benefits.

Since the AP’s investigation published, Oregon dropped its algorithm due to racial equity concerns and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy emphasized that parents and social workers needed more transparency about how government agencies were deploying algorithms as part of the nation’s first “AI Bill of Rights.”

The Justice Department has shown a broad interest in investigating algorithms in recent years, said Christy Lopez, a Georgetown University law professor who previously led some of the Justice Department’s civil rights division litigation and investigations.

In a keynote about a year ago, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke warned that AI technologies had “serious implications for the rights of people with disabilities,” and her division more recently issued guidance to employers saying using AI tools in hiring could violate the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“It appears to me that this is a priority for the division, investigating the extent to which algorithms are perpetuating discriminatory practices,” Lopez said of the Justice Department scrutiny of Allegheny’s tool.

Traci LaLiberte, a University of Minnesota expert on child welfare and disabilities, said the Justice Department’s inquiry stood out to her, as federal authorities have largely deferred to local child welfare agencies.

LaLiberte has published research detailing how parents with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the child welfare system. She challenged the idea of using data points related to disabilities in any algorithm because, she said, that assesses characteristics people can’t change, rather than their behavior.

“If it isn’t part of the behavior, then having it in the (algorithm) biases it,” LaLiberte said.

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HEADLINE	01/31 NATO chief wants more ‘friends’
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nato-chief-friends-russia-china-move-closer-96809777">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nato-chief-friends-russia-china-move-closer-96809777</a>
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- China's growing assertiveness and collaboration with Russia poses a threat not only to Asia but also to Europe, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday as he sought stronger cooperation and more “friends” for NATO in the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>Stoltenberg said China is increasingly investing in nuclear weapons and long-range missiles without providing transparency or engaging in meaningful dialogue on arms control for atomic weapons, while escalating coercion of its neighbors and threats against Taiwan, the self-ruled island it claims as its own territory.</p> <p>“The fact that Russia and China are coming closer and the significant investments by China and new advanced military capabilities just underlines that China poses a threat, poses a challenge also to NATO allies,” Stoltenberg told an audience at Keio University in Tokyo. “Security is not regional but global.”</p>

“NATO needs to make sure we have friends,” he said. “It is important to work more closely with our partners in the Indo-Pacific.”

China is increasingly working with Russia and they lead an “authoritarian pushback” against the rules-based, open and democratic international order, he said.

Stoltenberg said NATO does not regard China as an adversary or seek confrontation, and that the alliance will continue to engage with China in areas of common interest, such as climate change.

Stoltenberg and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held talks Tuesday and agreed to step up their partnership in security in cyberspace, space, defense and other areas.

Besides Japan, NATO is also strengthening “practical cooperation” with Australia, New Zealand and South Korea in maritime cybersecurity and other areas and stepping up participation of their leaders and ministers in NATO meetings, he said.

Kishida on Tuesday announced Japan’s plans to open a representative office at NATO.

Japan, already a close ally of the United States, has in recent years expanded its military ties with other Indo-Pacific nations as well as with Britain, Europe and NATO amid growing security threats from China and North Korea.

Tokyo was quick to join in U.S.-led economic sanctions against Russia’s war in Ukraine and provided humanitarian aid and non-combative defense equipment for Ukrainians. Japan fears that Russian aggression in Europe could be reflected in Asia, where concerns are growing over increasing Chinese assertiveness and escalating tensions over its claim to Taiwan.

Stoltenberg arrived in Japan late Monday from South Korea, where he called for Seoul to provide direct military support to Ukraine to help it fight off the prolonged Russian invasion.

North Korea condemned Stoltenberg’s visits to South Korea and Japan, saying that NATO was trying to put its “military boots in the region” to pressure America’s Asian allies into providing weapons to Ukraine.

North Korea also criticized increasing cooperation between NATO and U.S. allies in Asia as a process to create an “Asian version of NATO,” saying it would raise tensions in the region.

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HEADLINE	02/01 UK disruption: thousands in mass walkout
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/day-disruption-uk-thousands-join-mass-walkout-96810751">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/day-disruption-uk-thousands-join-mass-walkout-96810751</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON -- Thousands of schools in the U.K. are closing some or all of their classrooms, train services will be paralyzed and delays are expected at airports Wednesday in what’s shaping up to be the biggest day of industrial action Britain has seen in more than a decade, as unions step up pressure on the government to demand better pay amid a cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>The Trades Union Congress, a federation of unions, estimated that up to half a million workers, including teachers, university staff, civil servants, border officials and train and bus drivers, will walk out of their jobs across the country.</p> <p>More action, including by nurses and ambulance workers, is planned for the coming days and weeks.</p> <p>Britons have endured months of disruptions to their daily lives as a bitter dispute over pay and work conditions drags on between unions and the government. But Wednesday’s strikes mark an escalation of disruptive action across multiple key industries.</p>

The last time the country saw mass walkouts on this scale was in 2011, when well over 1 million public sector workers staged a one-day strike in a dispute over pensions.

Union bosses say that despite some pay rises — such as a 5% offer the government proposed to teachers — wages in the public sector have failed to keep pace with soaring inflation, effectively meaning workers have been taking a pay cut.

The Trades Union Congress said Wednesday the average public sector worker is 203 pounds (\$250) a month worse off compared with 2010, once inflation has been taken into account.

Inflation in the U.K. stands at 10.5%, the highest in 40 years, driven by skyrocketing food and energy costs. While some expect price rises to slow down this year, Britain's economic outlook remains grim. On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund said that Britain will be the only major economy to contract this year, performing worse even than sanction-hit Russia.

Nicola Hawkins, a primary school teacher, said striking was the only way to highlight chronic underfunding in state schools and get the government's attention.

"It is really difficult to make that decision to walk out, but I've come to the conclusion that it is in everyone's long-term interests really," she said. "It's been pointed out that recruitment targets aren't being met, that teachers are leaving, but our pay has been whittled away over the last decade or so."

The National Education Union said some 23,000 schools will be affected Wednesday, with an estimated 85% fully or partially closed. Others also on strike range from museum workers and London bus drivers to coastguards and border officials manning passport control booths at airports.

"It's everybody out ... of course there's going to be some disruption and some queues," Phil Douglas, director-general of Border Force, told reporters. "I don't rule out further industrial action."

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office acknowledged that Wednesday's wave of walkouts will cause "significant disruption" to people, and maintained that "negotiations rather than picket lines are the right approach." But union leaders say the government has refused to negotiate and offer enough to halt the strikes.

Unions have also been angered by the government's plans to introduce a new law aiming to curb strike disruptions by enforcing minimum service levels in key sectors, including health and transport.

Lawmakers on Monday backed the bill, which has been criticized by the unions as an attack on the right to strike.

On Wednesday thousands of people are expected to take part in protests against the bill in London and other cities.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Allies help Russia sidestep sanctions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/business/economy/russia-sanctions-trade-china-turkey.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/business/economy/russia-sanctions-trade-china-turkey.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A strange thing happened with smartphones in Armenia last summer.</p> <p>Shipments from other parts of the world into the tiny former Soviet republic began to balloon to more than 10 times the value of phone imports in previous months. At the same time, Armenia recorded an explosion in its exports of smartphones to a beleaguered ally: Russia.</p> <p>The trend, which was repeated for washing machines, computer chips and other products in a handful of other Asian countries last year, provides evidence of some of the new lifelines that are keeping the Russian economy afloat. Recent data show surges in trade for some of Russia's neighbors and allies, suggesting</p>

that countries like Turkey, China, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are stepping in to provide Russia with many of the products that Western countries have tried to cut off as punishment for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Those sanctions — which include [restrictions on Russia's largest banks](#) along with limits on [the sale of technology](#) that its military could use — are blocking access to a variety of products. Reports regularly filter out of Russia about consumers frustrated by high-priced or shoddy goods, ranging from milk and household appliances to computer software and medication, said Maria Snegovaya, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in an event at the think tank this month.

Even so, Russian trade appears to have largely bounced back to where it was before the invasion of Ukraine last February. Analysts estimate that Russia's imports may have already recovered to prewar levels, or will soon do so, depending on their models.

In part, that could be because many nations have [found Russia hard to quit](#). [Recent research](#) showed that fewer than 9 percent of companies based in the European Union and Group of 7 nations had divested one of their Russian subsidiaries. And maritime tracking firms have seen a surge in activity by shipping fleets that may be helping Russia to export its energy, apparently bypassing Western restrictions on those sales.

While Western countries have not banned the shipment of consumer products like cellphones and washing machines to Russia, [other sweeping penalties](#) were expected to clamp down on its economy. They include a [cap on the price that Russia can charge for its oil](#) as well as restricted access to semiconductors and other critical technology.

Some companies, including H&M, IBM, Volkswagen and Maersk, halted operations in Russia after the invasion, citing moral and logistical reasons. But the Russian economy has proved surprisingly resilient, raising questions about the efficacy of the West's sanctions. Countries have had difficulty reducing their reliance on Russia for energy and other basic commodities, and the Russian central bank has managed to prop up the value of the ruble and keep financial markets stable.

On Monday, the International Monetary Fund said it now expected the Russian economy to grow 0.3 percent this year, a sharp improvement from its previous estimate of a 2.3 percent contraction.

The I.M.F. also said it expected Russian crude oil export volume to stay relatively strong under the current price cap, and Russian trade to continue being redirected to countries that had not imposed sanctions.

Most container ships have stopped ferrying goods like phones, washing machines and car parts into the port of St. Petersburg. Instead, such products are being carried on trucks or trains from Belarus, China and Kazakhstan. Fesco, the Russian transport operator, has added new ships and new ports of call to [a route with Turkey](#) that transports Russian industrial goods and foreign appliances and electronics between Novorossiysk and Istanbul.

Sergey Aleksashenko, former deputy minister of finance of the Russian Federation, said at an event this month that 2023 would be "a difficult year" for the Russian economy, but that there would be "no catastrophe, no collapse."

Some parts of the Russian economy are struggling, he said, pointing to car factories that shut down after being unable to secure parts from Germany, France, Japan and South Korea. But military expenditures and higher energy prices helped prop it up last year.

"We may not say that Russian economy is in tatters, that it is destroyed, that Putin lacks funds to continue his war," Mr. Aleksashenko said, referring to President Vladimir V. Putin. "No, it's not true."

Russia stopped publishing trade data after its invasion of Ukraine. But analysts and economists can still draw conclusions about its trade patterns by adding up the commerce that other countries report with Russia.

Matthew Klein, an economics writer and a co-author of “Trade Wars Are Class Wars,” is one of the people drawing conclusions about this Russia-size hole in the global economy. According to [his calculations](#), the value of global exports to Russia in November was just 15 percent below a monthly preinvasion average.

Global exports to Russia most likely fully recovered in December, though many countries have not yet issued their trade data for the month, he said.

“Most of that recovery has been driven overall by China and Turkey particularly,” Mr. Klein said.

It’s unclear how much of this trade violates sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe, but the patterns are “suspicious,” he said. “It would be consistent with the idea that there are ways of trying to get around some of the sanctions.”

Silverado Policy Accelerator, a Washington nonprofit, recently issued a [similar analysis](#), estimating that the value of Russian imports from the rest of the world had exceeded prewar levels by September.

One of the case studies in that report was the jump in Armenian smartphone sales. Andrew S. David, the senior director of research and analysis at Silverado, said the trends reflected how supply chains had shifted to continue providing Russia with goods.

Samsung and Apple, previously major suppliers of Russian cellphones, pulled out of the Russian market after the invasion. Exports of popular Chinese phone brands, like Xiaomi, Realme and Honor, also initially dipped as companies struggled to understand and cope with new restrictions on sending technology or making international payments to Russia.

But after an “adjustment period,” Chinese brands started to take off in Russia, Mr. David said. Overall Chinese exports to Russia reached a record high in December, helping to offset a steep drop in trade with Europe. Apple and Samsung phones also appeared to begin to find their way back to Russia, rerouted through friendly neighboring countries.

“Armenia is certainly not the only one,” Mr. David said. “There’s a lot coming through central western Asia, Turkey and the former Soviet republics.”

Shipments to Russia of other products, like passenger vehicles, have also rebounded. And China has increased exports of semiconductors to Russia, though Russia’s total chip imports remain below prewar levels.

One major open question is how effectively [the Western price cap](#) will hold down Russia’s oil revenue this year.

The cap allows Russia to sell its oil globally using Western maritime insurance and financing as long as the price does not exceed \$60 per barrel. That limit, which is essentially an exception to Group of 7 sanctions, is designed to keep oil flowing on global markets while limiting the Russian government’s revenue from it.

Some analysts have suggested that Russia is finding ways around the effort by using ships that do not rely on Western insurance or financing.

Ami Daniel, the chief executive of Windward, a maritime data company, said he had seen hundreds of instances in which people from countries like the United Arab Emirates, India, China, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia bought vessels to try to set up what appeared to be a non-Western trading framework for Russia.

	<p>“Basically, Russia has been gearing up toward being able to trade outside of the rule of law,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Daniel said his firm had also seen <a href="#">a sharp uptick</a> in shipping practices that appeared to be Russian efforts to contravene Western sanctions. They include transfers of Russian oil between ships far out at sea, in international waters that are not under the jurisdiction of any country’s navy, and attempts by ships to <a href="#">mask their activities</a> by turning off satellite trackers that log their location or transmitting fake coordinates.</p> <p>Much of this activity had been taking place in the mid-Atlantic Ocean. But after media coverage of suspicious practices in this region, the hub moved south, off the coast of West Africa, Mr. Daniel said.</p> <p>“They’re exploding,” he said of deceptive shipping practices. “It’s happening at an industrial scale.”</p> <p>So far, the oil price cap appears to be accomplishing its goal of reducing the price that Russia can charge while keeping global supplies flowing. But it remains to be seen whether this shadow fleet of ships is big enough to allow Russia to buy and sell oil outside the cap, said Ben Cahill, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, during a January panel discussion.</p> <p>“If that fleet is big enough for Russia to really operate outside the reach” of the Group of 7 countries, the cap probably “won’t have the kind of leverage that policymakers wanted,” Mr. Cahill said. “I think we should know within a couple of months.”</p>
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## Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/31 War strengthens Russia ties w/cyber crooks
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/how-the-war-in-ukraine-has-strengthened-the-kremlins-ties-with-cybercriminals/">https://therecord.media/how-the-war-in-ukraine-has-strengthened-the-kremlins-ties-with-cybercriminals/</a>
GIST	<p>Before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, its law enforcement agencies carried out a series of arrests targeting prominent hacking groups and darknet forums including REvil, SkyFraud, Ferum Shop and Trump’s Dumps.</p> <p>The crackdowns were touted as a demonstration of Russia’s willingness to fight cybercrime and cooperate with foreign states in their investigations against Russia-linked hackers. But according to new research, Russian intelligence, military, and law enforcement services have tapped into “established and systematic relationships” with hacking groups since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, using them to coordinate and amplify their cyber and information operations.</p> <p>Pro-Kremlin hackers have changed their tactics and techniques since the invasion began, and have become more polarized, researchers at Recorded Future said in a report published Tuesday. Even financially-motivated hackers are aiding the interests of the Russian state — both intentionally and coincidentally.</p> <p>For example, hackers who leak Ukrainians’ data on darknet forums can sell the databases to Russian state-sponsored threat actors. These groups use the compromised information to conduct long-term information operations or espionage campaigns targeting Ukrainian citizens and government officials, the researchers said. The Record is an editorially independent unit of Recorded Future.</p> <p>The vast majority of leaked content consists of misinformation, trolling, and benign political chatter, according to the report, but some of the compromised data could affect the administration and operations of the Ukrainian government and its allies.</p> <p>The anonymity granted by darknet forums also allows Russian state-affiliated hackers to operate in disguise, as in the case of a user called FreeCivilian, who sold the data of millions of Ukrainians on the</p>



now-defunct RaidForums and who may be part of the Russian nation-state hacker group Ember Bear, researchers said. Additionally, many of these hackers are using commodity malware available on Russian-language forums instead of custom malware used in previous operations, which makes it harder for investigators to attribute the attacks.

### **Hacktivist movement**

One of the most noticeable shifts that the war has brought out in cyberspace is the emergence of hacktivist groups that have pledged allegiance to one side or the other.

According to the research, many of these groups — which are ostensibly independent — have ties to the Russian government and serve its interests.

Since the start of the war, at least two pro-Russian hacktivist groups, Killnet and Xaknet, have dedicated themselves to cyberattacks against perceived enemies of Russia. Both groups began to actively attack Ukraine and its allies at the beginning of 2022, but not all of their declared attacks were actually confirmed.

Based on the timing of some of the cyberattacks and the release of specific data, researchers identified links between Xaknet and several other pro-Russian hacktivist groups with Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU.

The use of fake hacktivist fronts and proxies is not a new strategy for the GRU, and they are expected to continue to play a role in cyber operations against NATO and the West, according to the report.

"This provides a veneer of plausible deniability for Russia in these operations, enabling the Russian government to subvert claims of state-sponsored attacks against Western entities," the researchers said.

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HEADLINE	01/31 NikoWiper targeted Ukraine energy sector
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/new-report-reveals-nikowiper-malware.html">https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/new-report-reveals-nikowiper-malware.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Russia-affiliated Sandworm used yet another wiper malware strain dubbed NikoWiper as part of an attack that took place in October 2022 targeting an energy sector company in Ukraine.</p> <p>"The NikoWiper is based on SDelete, a command line utility from Microsoft that is used for securely deleting files," cybersecurity company ESET revealed in its latest APT Activity Report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>The Slovak cybersecurity firm said the attacks coincided with missile strikes orchestrated by the Russian armed forces aimed at the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, suggesting overlaps in objectives.</p> <p>The disclosure comes merely days after ESET attributed Sandworm to a Golang-based data wiper known as SwiftSlicer that was deployed against an unnamed Ukrainian entity on January 25, 2023.</p> <p>The advanced persistent threat (APT) group linked to Russia's foreign military intelligence agency GRU has also been implicated in a partially successful attack targeting national news agency Ukrinform, deploying as many as five different wipers on compromised machines.</p> <p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) identified the five wiper variants as CaddyWiper, ZeroWipe, SDelete, AwfulShred, and BidSwipe. The first three of these targeted Windows systems, while AwfulShred and BidSwipe took aim at Linux and FreeBSD systems.</p> <p>The use of SDelete is notable, as it suggests that Sandworm has been experimenting with the utility as a wiper in at least two different instances to cause irrevocable damage to the targeted organizations in Ukraine.</p>



That said, Robert Lipovsky, senior malware researcher for ESET, told The Hacker News that "NikoWiper is a different malware."

Besides weaponizing SDelete, Sandworm's recent campaigns have also leveraged bespoke ransomware families, including Prestige and RansomBoggs, to lock victim data behind encryption barriers without any option to recover them.

The efforts are the latest indication that the use of destructive wiper malware is on the rise and is being increasingly adopted as a cyber weapon of choice among Russian hacking crews.

"Wipers have not been used widely as they're targeted weapons," BlackBerry's Dmitry Bestuzhev told The Hacker News in a statement. "Sandworm has been actively working on developing wipers and ransomware families used explicitly for Ukraine."

It's not just Sandworm, as other Russian state-sponsored outfits such as APT29, Callisto, and Gamaredon have engaged in parallel efforts to cripple Ukrainian infrastructure via spear-phishing campaigns designed to facilitate backdoor access and credential theft.

According to Recorded Future, which tracks APT29 (aka Nobelium) under the moniker BlueBravo, the APT has been connected to new compromised infrastructure that's likely employed as a lure to deliver a malware loader codenamed GraphicalNeutrino.

The loader, whose main function is to deliver follow-on malware, abuses Notion's API for command-and-control (C2) communications as well as the platform's database feature to store victim information and stage payloads for download.

"Any country with a nexus to the Ukraine crisis, particularly those with key geopolitical, economic, or military relationships with Russia or Ukraine, are at increased risk of targeting," the company said in a technical report published last week.

The shift to Notion, a legitimate note-taking application, underscores APT29's "broadening but continued use" of popular software services like Dropbox, Google Drive, and Trello to blend malware traffic and circumvent detection.

Although no second-stage malware was detected, ESET – which also found a sample of the malware in October 2022 – theorized it was "aimed at fetching and executing Cobalt Strike."

The findings also come close on the heels of Russia stating that it was the target of the West's "coordinated aggression" in 2022 and that it faced "unprecedented external cyber attacks" from "intelligence agencies, transnational IT corporations, and hacktivists."

As the Russo-Ukrainian war officially enters its twelfth month, it remains to be seen how the conflict evolves forward in the cyber realm.

"Over the past year we have seen waves of increased activity – such as in the spring after the invasion, in the fall and quieter months over the summer – but overall there's been a nearly constant stream of attacks," Lipovsky said. "So one thing that we can be sure about is that we will be seeing more cyber attacks."

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HEADLINE	02/01 Prilex PoS malware evolves
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/02/prilex-pos-malware-evolves-to-block.html">https://thehackernews.com/2023/02/prilex-pos-malware-evolves-to-block.html</a>
GIST	The Brazilian threat actors behind an advanced and modular point-of-sale (PoS) malware known as Prilex have reared their head once again with new updates that allow it to block contactless payment transactions.

Russian cybersecurity firm Kaspersky said it detected three versions of Prilex (06.03.8080, 06.03.8072, and 06.03.8070) that are capable of targeting NFC-enabled credit cards, taking its criminal scheme a notch higher.

Having evolved out of ATM-focused malware into PoS malware over the years since going operational in 2014, the threat actor steadily incorporated new features that are designed to facilitate credit card fraud, including a technique called GHOST transactions.

While contactless payments have taken off in a big way, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the underlying motive behind the new functionality is to disable the feature so as to force the user to insert the card into the PIN pad.

To that end, the latest version of Prilex, which Kaspersky discovered in November 2022, has been found to implement a rule-based logic to determine whether or not to capture credit card information alongside an option to block NFC-based transactions.

"This is due to the fact that NFC-based transactions often generate a unique ID or card number valid for only one transaction," researchers said.

Should such an NFC-based transaction be detected and blocked by the malware installed on the infected PoS terminal, the PIN pad reader displays a fake error message: "Contactless error, insert your card."

This leads the victim to use their physical card by inserting it into the PIN pad reader, effectively permitting the threat actors to commit fraud. Another new feature added to the artifacts is the ability to filter credit cards by segments and craft rules tailored to those tiers.

"These rules can block NFC and capture card data only if the card is a Black/Infinite, Corporate or another tier with a high transaction limit, which is much more attractive than standard credit cards with a low balance/limit," the researchers noted.

"Since transaction data generated during a contactless payment are useless from a cybercriminal's perspective, it is understandable that Prilex needs to force victims to insert the card into the infected PoS terminal."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Target: healthcare providers, hospitals</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/breach/maryland-hospital-facing-outages-after-significant-ransomware-attack">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/breach/maryland-hospital-facing-outages-after-significant-ransomware-attack</a> <a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/hospitals-urged-to-tighten-ddos-defenses-after-health-data-found-on-killnet-list">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/hospitals-urged-to-tighten-ddos-defenses-after-health-data-found-on-killnet-list</a>
GIST	<p>Atlantic General Hospital in Maryland is experiencing network disruptions and outages after a significant <a href="#">ransomware attack</a> deployed this weekend, according to local news outlet WMDT47.</p> <p>The ongoing outages have caused "limited" patient interruptions, as clinicians maintain operations with downtime procedures. The hospital is continuing to treat patients with all services remaining in operation, outside of its pharmacy, outpatient imaging, and pulmonary function testing.</p> <p>A notice posted to the Atlantic General website also notes the walk-in outpatient lab "is temporarily closed until further notice."</p> <p>The hospital has not added any further notices to its website, and its social media account makes no reference to the outages. The ongoing incident is currently under investigation with support from an outside cybersecurity firm.</p>

SC Media has reached out to Atlantic General for confirmation and will update this story as more information becomes available.

### **Lutheran Social Services of Illinois informs 184K of 2021 hack**

Approximately 184,000 individuals tied to [Lutheran Social Services of Illinois](#) are learning that their data was likely accessed during a ransomware attack more than one year ago on Dec. 31, 2021.

The Office for Civil Rights recently reminded covered entities of timely reporting of breaches to protected health information and required within 60 days of discovery by The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

The LSSI notice appears to explain the massive notification delay on a “extensive forensic investigation and comprehensive review of all the data impacted.

The ransomware attack was first detected on Jan. 27, 2022, prompting LSSI to disable and isolate the affected systems to contain the threat. The subsequent investigation led with support from an outside cybersecurity firm professionals experienced in handling these types of incidents.

The review concluded in December 2022, which confirmed the possible access to patient data occurred for nearly a month between Dec. 31, 2021, to Jan. 27, 2022. The compromised data included names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, biometric data, driver’s licenses, financial details, health insurance information, diagnoses, and treatments.

### **In brief: LockBit adds two healthcare providers**

The LockBit ransomware group recently added two more healthcare provider organizations to its dark web leak site: Juva Skin & Laser Center in New York and Arizona Liver Health. Neither of the entity’s have confirmed the alleged incidents.

LockBit has notoriously targeted the healthcare sector, despite members claiming to avoid provider organizations. The group was behind the cyberattack on the [Center Hospitalier Sud Francilien](#) in France in August 2022.

Their [latest publicized healthcare incident](#) was an attack and subsequent network outage at Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in December. LockBit blamed the incident on a “partner” actor and issued an apology, before issuing the hospital a free decryptor to remediate the issues it caused.

[HHS recently issued an alert](#) on the group, after researchers observed LockBit shifting to triple extortion tactics.

### **UCHealth reports data theft tied to third-party vendor Diligent**

An undisclosed number of UCHealth patients and employees are being notified that their data was stolen, after a threat actor gained access to the network of one of its third-party vendors. The business associate, Diligent, provides the Colorado health system with business operations tools.

The "security incident" allowed the hacker to access Diligent software and download attachments, including UCHealth files. Those files included employee and patient data. No UCHealth systems were compromised by the incident.

The stolen data varied by individual and could include names, contact information, dates of birth, and treatment-related details. For some, SSNs and other financial information was also downloaded.

### **94K UCLA Health patients alerted to tracking tool privacy incident**

[UCLA Health](#) has joined the growing list of providers to report privacy incidents through the use of tracking tech. While Meta and Google Pixel are not directly named, the notice references the June 2022 report detailing the alleged scraping of hospital data via Pixel tools.

The OCR breach reporting tool shows 94,000 UCLA health patients were notified by the health system that its use of “analytics tools” on its website and mobile app possibly disclosed its personal and health data to third parties.

“Specifically, UCLA Health’s analytics tools on an appointment request form completed on the UCLA Health website or the UCLA Health mobile app may have captured and transmitted to our third-party service providers certain limited information from the appointment request form,” according to the notice.

The notice adds that the use of these tools began in April 2020. Much [like the disclosures from](#) WakeMed and [Aurora Health](#), UCLA Health installed the tech to understand how its community interacted with health system webpages for “more effective and efficient communication.”

Upon learning of the data scraping concerns in June 2022, UCLA Health promptly disabled the use of the tools and launched an investigation.

The review confirmed that the analytics tools captured and disclosed patients’ URL/website addresses, provider names, specialty, ad campaign names, page views, IP addresses, third-party cookies, and hashed values of certain fields on the appointment request form, such as patient names, email addresses, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and genders.

The review confirmed only the appointment request forms present on the UCLA Health website and the UCLA Health mobile app were affected. The UCLA Health patient portal was not impacted.

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The Killnet hacktivist group is actively targeting the health sector with DDoS attacks, claiming to have successfully exfiltrated data from a number of hospitals within the last month, according to a Department of Health and Human Services [Cybersecurity Coordination Center alert](#).

In fact, users found and publicly shared global health and personal information belonging to global health organizations on the alleged Killnet list on Jan. 28.

John Riggi, the American Hospital Association’s national advisor for cybersecurity and risk, warned that “As of today, we understand that some of the named entities were, in fact, targeted by DDoS attacks.”

However, the impact of the activity was found to be “minimal and temporary with no impact to care delivery services,” he added. Although DDoS attacks don’t typically cause significant damage, the traffic surges brought on by these cyberattacks can cause website outages that can last for several hours or days.

As such, provider entities should ensure they have adequate DDoS protection for their web hosting.

Killnet is notorious for launching DDoS attacks with “thousands of connection requests and packets to be sent to the target server or website per minute, slowing down or even stopping vulnerable systems,” according to a [December HC3 alert that followed](#) a successful attack on a U.S. healthcare entity.

The group operates multiple public channels for recruitment purposes and has suspected ties with Russian government organizations like the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) or the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). But the connections have not been confirmed.

What’s clear is that the group’s senior members have extensive experience with deploying DDoS attacks, having “previously operated their own DDoS services and botnets. Most of these operations rely on publicly available DDoS scripts and IP stressers.

But researchers are divided on the group’s impact, noting the group has failed at pivoting their attack models. In October, for example, [Killnet successfully blocked the infrastructure of J.P. Morgan](#) but was unable to disrupt the bank operations.

The Department of Justice seized 48 internet domains tied to some of the biggest DDoS-for-hire services and issued criminal charges against six individuals in December, but it's unclear how these enforcement actions will impact Killnet, if at all, particularly given the group's recent success.

And while Killnet is known to exaggerate the impact of its nefarious operations, HC3, AHA, Health-ISAC, and FBI officials have confirmed the credibility of the ongoing campaign against the health sector. The groups are actively coordinating on Killnet and the possible impact.

In past incidents, Killnet has targeted or threatened to target healthcare entities. In one instance, a senior member of the group threatened Congress with the sale of the personal and health information of Americans who support of Ukraine.

The group already targeted a U.S. health organization in December that supports U.S. service members. Killnet claimed to have stolen a large amount of user data from the entity, while making threats against other global health providers. HC3 is also concerned that other pro-Russian ransomware groups or operators will lend support to Killnet.

The alert warns that the ongoing campaign may "result in entities KillNet targeted also being hit with ransomware or DDoS attacks as a means of extortion, a tactic several ransomware groups have used. But "it is worth taking any claims KillNet makes about its attacks or operations with a grain of salt."

However, that doesn't mean providers should not ensure they are leveraging the best possible defenses against their external-facing platforms. It's certainly not possible to completely eliminate the risk of a DDoS attack against the enterprise, but providers can take practical steps to ensure they can quickly pivot in the event of an attack.

Security teams must understand their services, potential exposures, upstream defenses, testing, monitoring, and possible scaling, while practicing a thorough response plan. To mitigate a DDoS threat, entities should consider using web application firewalls and a multi-content delivery network (CDN) solution.

The HC3 alert contains a deeper look at recommended remediation measures.

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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 QNAP devices exposed via new bug</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/nearly-30000-qnap-devices-exposed/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/nearly-30000-qnap-devices-exposed/</a>
GIST	<p>A critical new vulnerability disclosed by network-attached storage (NAS) vendor <a href="#">QNAP this week</a> could be exploited on almost 30,000 devices globally, according to <a href="#">Censys</a>.</p> <p>The security firm scanned the internet to find 67,415 hosts running QNAP-based systems around the world. Although it could only find the version number on 30,250 of them, a worrying 98% were potentially vulnerable to an attack exploiting the new flaw.</p> <p>Only a few hundred were running the updated firmware versions released by the Taiwanese vendor to remediate the bug, said Censys senior security researchers, Mark Ellzey.</p> <p>"We found that of the 30,520 hosts with a version, only 557 were running QuTS Hero greater than or equal to 'h5.0.1.2248' or QTS greater than or equal to '5.0.1.2234,' meaning 29,968 hosts could be affected by this vulnerability," he warned.</p> <p>"If the exploit is published and weaponized, it could spell trouble to thousands of QNAP users. Everyone must upgrade their QNAP devices immediately to be safe from future ransomware campaigns."</p> <p>Most of the vulnerable hosts reside in the US (3149), followed by Italy (3200) and Taiwan (1942).</p>

	<p>Details of the vulnerability in question, <a href="#">CVE-2022-27596</a>, are being kept under wraps for now, presumably to give customers time to patch. However, it may not be long before threat actors look to weaponize it in exploits, Censys warned.</p> <p>“We’ve discussed problems with QNAP regarding the Deadbolt ransomware campaigns, which at their height infected over 20,000 devices and successfully stole just under \$200,000 from victims. While there are no indications that bad actors are using this new exploit, the threat is definitely on the horizon,” <a href="#">Ellzey argued</a>.</p> <p>“Given that the Deadbolt ransomware is geared to target QNAP NAS devices specifically, it’s very likely that if an exploit is made public, the same criminals will use it to spread the same ransomware again.”</p> <p>The CVE appears to be an SQL injection vulnerability which is trivial to exploit and requires no authentication. It was given a CVSS score of 9.8.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Ransomware deployed by 100 threat actors</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/microsoft-over-100-threat-actors-deploy-ransomware-in-attacks/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/microsoft-over-100-threat-actors-deploy-ransomware-in-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>Microsoft revealed today that its security teams are tracking over 100 threat actors deploying ransomware during attacks. In all, the company says it monitors over 50 unique ransomware families that were actively used until the end of last year.</p> <p>"Some of the most prominent ransomware payloads in recent campaigns include Lockbit Black, BlackCat (aka ALPHV), Play, Vice Society, Black Basta, &amp; Royal," Microsoft said.</p> <p>"Defense strategies, however, should focus less on payloads but more on the chain of activities that lead to their deployment," since ransomware gangs are still targeting servers and devices not yet patched against common or recently addressed vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Furthermore, while new ransomware families launch all the time, most threat actors utilize the same tactics when breaching and spreading through networks, making the effort of detecting such behavior even more helpful in thwarting their attacks.</p> <p>As Redmond added, attackers increasingly rely on tactics beyond phishing to conduct their attacks, with threat actors, such as DEV-0671 and DEV-0882, capitalizing on recently patched Exchange Server vulnerabilities to hack vulnerable servers and deploy Cuba and Play ransomware.</p> <p>Last week, the Exchange team urged admins to deploy the latest supported Cumulative Update (CU) to secure on-premises Exchange servers and have them always ready to install an emergency security update.</p> <p>Over 60,000 Internet-exposed Exchange servers are still vulnerable to attacks leveraging ProxyNotShell RCE exploits. At the same time, thousands still wait to be secured from attacks targeting the ProxyShell and ProxyLogon flaws, two of the most exploited security flaws of 2021.</p> <p>Other ransomware actors are also switching to or using malvertising to deliver malware loaders and downloaders that help push ransomware and various other malware strains, such as information stealers.</p> <p>For instance, a threat actor tracked as DEV-0569, believed to be an initial access broker for ransomware gangs, is now abusing Google Ads in widespread advertising campaigns to distribute malware, steal passwords from infected devices, and ultimately gain access to enterprise networks.</p> <p>They use this access as part of their attacks or sell it to other malicious actors, including the Royal ransomware gang.</p>



	<p>Last year was marked by the end of the Conti cybercrime operation and the rise of new ransomware-as-a-service (Raas) operations, including Royal, Play, and BlackBasta.</p> <p>Meanwhile, LockBit, Hive, Cuba, BlackCat, and Ragnar ransomware operators have kept breaching and trying to extort a steady stream of victims throughout 2022.</p> <p>Nevertheless, ransomware gangs saw a <a href="#">massive revenue drop of around 40%</a> last year as they were only able to extort roughly \$456.8 million from victims throughout 2022, after a record-breaking \$765 million in the previous two years, according to blockchain analytics company Chainalysis.</p> <p>However, this significant decline was not driven by fewer attacks but by their victims' refusal to pay the attackers' ransom demands.</p> <p>This year has started with a <a href="#">big win against ransomware groups</a> after the Hive ransomware data leak and Tor payment dark web sites were seized as part of an international law enforcement operation involving the U.S. Department of Justice, the FBI, the Secret Service, and Europol.</p> <p>After hacking into Hive's servers, the FBI distributed more than 1,300 decryption keys to Hive victims and gained access to Hive communication records, malware file hashes, and details on 250 Hive affiliates.</p> <p>The same day, the U.S. State Department <a href="#">offered up to \$10 million</a> for any information that could help link the Hive ransomware gang (or other threat actors) with foreign governments.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Hackers impersonate LockBit in attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/application-security/poser-hackers-impersonate-lockbit-smb-cyberattacks">https://www.darkreading.com/application-security/poser-hackers-impersonate-lockbit-smb-cyberattacks</a>
GIST	<p>A recent spate of cyberattacks against small to midsize businesses (SMBs) across Northern Europe was initially believed to be the handiwork of LockBit, but following further investigation, it turns out that a copycat group is using leaked LockBit malware for campaigns of its own.</p> <p>According reports from Belgium's Computerland publication, the "wannabes," while not as sophisticated as the LockBit operators themselves, were able to encrypt the files of at least one organization. The <a href="#">LockBit</a> impersonators were able to exploit an unpatched FortiGate firewall, researcher <a href="#">Pierluigi Paganini explained</a>.</p> <p>"Despite not being the true LockBit locker group, these micro-criminals were still able to cause significant damage by encrypting a large number of internal files," Paganini added. "However, the company was able to restore its network from backups and no client workstations were affected during the intrusions."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Hackers dupe Microsoft to obtain status</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/phishers-trick-microsoft-granting-verified-cloud-partner-status">https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/phishers-trick-microsoft-granting-verified-cloud-partner-status</a>
GIST	<p>Late last year, a group of threat actors managed to obtain "verified publisher" status through the Microsoft Cloud Partner Program (MCP). This allowed them to surpass levels of brand impersonation ordinarily seen in phishing campaigns, as they distributed malicious applications bolstered by a verified blue badge only ever given to trusted vendors and service providers in the Microsoft ecosystem.</p> <p>The MCP is Microsoft's channel partner program, inhabited by 400,000-plus companies that sell and support its enterprise products and services and also build their own solutions and software around them. Members include managed services providers, independent software vendors, and business app developers, among others.</p> <p>Researchers from Proofpoint first discovered this activity on Dec. 6 of last year. A <a href="#">report</a> published on Jan. 31 outlines how threat actors used their bogus status as verified app publishers within the MCP program to infiltrate UK- and Ireland-based organizations' cloud environments. The fake solutions partners targeted</p>



employees in finance and marketing, as well as managers and executives, via malicious applications. Users who fell for the badge potentially exposed themselves to account takeover, data exfiltration, and business email compromise (BEC), and their organizations were laid open to brand impersonation.

Overall, the campaign "used unprecedented sophistication to bypass Microsoft's security mechanisms," the researchers tell Dark Reading. "This was an extremely well-thought-out operation."

### **How the Hackers Duped Microsoft**

To become a verified publisher, Microsoft Cloud Partners must meet a set of [eight criteria](#). These criteria are largely technical and, as Microsoft outlined in its documentation, passing the bar "doesn't imply or indicate quality criteria you might look for in an app." But threat actors abusing the system to distribute malicious apps? That's not supposed to happen.

The trick in this case was that, before phishing end users, the attackers tricked Microsoft itself.

To wit: They registered as publishers under "displayed" names that mimicked legitimate companies. Meanwhile, their associated "verified publisher" names were hidden and slightly different. The example given by the researchers is that a publisher masquerading as "Acme LLC" might have a verified publisher name "Acme Holdings LLC."

Evidently, this was enough to skate by the systems' verification process. In fact, researchers noted, "in two cases, the verification was granted one day after the creation of the malicious application."

When reached for comment on the failure of the verification process, Proofpoint did not offer further details, and a Microsoft spokesperson merely noted, "Consent phishing is an ongoing, industrywide issue, and we're continuously monitoring for new attack patterns. We've disabled these malicious apps and are taking additional steps to harden our services to help keep customers secure."

The spokesperson added, "The limited number of customers who were impacted by the campaign described in the Proofpoint blog have been notified."

### **How the Hackers Duped Enterprise Users**

Having obtained their verified status, the threat actors began spreading malicious OAuth apps, an [increasingly popular](#) vehicle for cyberattackers in recent years. They rigged these apps to request broad access to victims' accounts.

"The actor used fraudulent partner accounts to add a [verified publisher](#) to OAuth app registrations they created in Azure AD," according to an [advisory](#) published Jan. 31. "The applications created by these fraudulent actors were then used in a consent phishing campaign, which tricked users into granting permissions to the fraudulent apps."

OAuth — short for "open authorization" — is a token-based framework that enables users to authorize certain data sharing between third-party applications, without needing to divulge their login credentials in the process. A common example is the "log in with Google" or "log in with Facebook" options that many websites offer to avoid having to create a new set of credentials to use with the sites. OAuth dialogues are common enough that users [typically just hit "Accept,"](#) without digging into the fine details of what they're agreeing to.

Snuffing out this consent phishing campaign would have required a great deal more vigilance than that. Beyond the "verified publisher" stamp of approval, the attackers gave vague and innocuous names to the apps requesting permissions: Two were called, simply, "Single Sign-on (SSO)," and one "Meeting." And though publishing under the guise of other impersonated organizations, the attackers chose a household name to display to users at the requested permissions stage.

"The attacker(s) used different data fields to fool targeted users," the Proofpoint researchers said. "They used one name, identical to the impersonated org's name, as the visible publisher name. The other name was used as a hidden parameter, not visible in the malicious app's consent page."

In one case, "they used an outdated version of the well-recognized Zoom icon," the Proofpoint authors explained in the report, "and redirected to Zoom-resembling URLs, as well as a genuine Zoom domain, to increase their credibility."

To conclude, they put it bluntly: "End users are likely to fall prey to the advanced social engineering methods outlined in this blog."

Victims who fell for the gambit granted their attackers permission to access special areas of their accounts, like their mailboxes and calendars. The permissions also included offline access, enabling the hackers to do what they wished entirely out of view.

### **Bogus OAuth Apps: Takeaways for Business**

After learning about the campaign on Dec. 15, Microsoft disabled the malicious applications and associated publisher accounts. It then enlisted its Digital Crimes Unit to investigate further.

According to Microsoft, "We have implemented several additional security measures to improve the MCPP vetting process and decrease the risk of similar fraudulent behavior in the future."

To defend against future campaigns of this kind, Proofpoint researchers recommended deploying effective cloud security solutions to help detect malicious applications, and pointed readers to Microsoft's [advisory](#) regarding consent phishing. Their most important bit of advice was "to exercise caution when granting access to third-party OAuth apps, even if they are verified by Microsoft."

"Do not," they wrote, "trust and rely on OAuth apps based on their verified publisher status alone."

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HEADLINE	01/31 UK 28% attacks targeted financial services
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/quarter-cyber-attacks-uk-financial/?web_view=true">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/quarter-cyber-attacks-uk-financial/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Security researchers have suggested that over a quarter of all cyber-attacks (28%) in the UK have hit the financial services and insurance (FSI) industry in the last 12 months.</p> <p>The data comes from the Imperva cybersecurity team via email, who also said that application programming interface (API) attacks, bad bots and DDoS attacks were the industry's three most significant security challenges over the last year.</p> <p>"The scale of the shadow API problem should be a concern for every business," commented Andy Zollo, regional vice president for EMEA at <a href="#">Imperva</a>.</p> <p>According to the executive, the idea that a third of all that traffic goes unmonitored indicates that organizations urgently need to revise their API protection strategies.</p> <p>"APIs connect directly to the data layer, so businesses have to see API security as an extension of their data security strategy," Zollo added. "Every organization needs full visibility over every API in their environment, what data is flowing through each one, and who's accessing it."</p> <p>The claims come almost four years after Open Banking started requiring banks and other FSI businesses <a href="#">to enable third-party providers</a> to access customers' banking data via APIs.</p> <p>According to Imperva, this has not only dramatically increased the amount of sensitive financial data these entities exchange but also significantly increased the number of APIs in use in the FSI industry.</p>

	<p>"The scale of unmonitored API traffic is substantially higher than in other industries, suggesting that FSI companies' implementation of Open Banking standards may have inadvertently created a serious, industry-wide security threat," reads the report.</p> <p>As for figures concerning "bad bots," Imperva explained that these automated, malicious software applications were responsible for more than a quarter (27%) of all traffic to financial businesses last year.</p> <p>Account takeover (ATO) attempts also heavily targeted the FSI industry, with roughly 40% of all ATOs hitting financial websites.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 DocuSign brand impersonation attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/docusign-impersonation-attack/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/docusign-impersonation-attack/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>A DocuSign brand impersonation attack has been observed bypassing native cloud and inline email security solutions and targeting over 10,000 end users across multiple organizations.</p> <p>The findings come from security researchers at <a href="#">Armorblox</a>, who described the new threat in an advisory shared with <i>Infosecurity</i> via email.</p> <p>“At first glance, the email seems to be a legitimate communication from DocuSign, with the sender name being manipulated by the attacker, reading <i>DocuSign</i>,” reads the <a href="#">technical write-up</a>.</p> <p>“However, the email address and domain show us no association to the company – hard to see on mobile devices where end users frequently open email communications from.”</p> <p>Further, Armorblox explained that the email attack spoofed a common workflow action from a legitimate instance of DocuSign. Normally, an email is sent to the signee after a document has been completed. The spoofed email in this attack had the goal of instilling a similar sense of trust in victims.</p> <p>“Attackers used a valid domain to send this malicious email. Upon further analysis from the Armorblox Research Team, the sender domain [...], which failed DKIM Alignment checks, received a trustworthy reputation score for this established domain.”</p> <p>Upon clicking on malicious links within the phishing email, victims would have been redirected to a fake landing page designed to exfiltrate their Proofpoint user credentials.</p> <p>Armorblox said the attack bypassed both Microsoft Office 365 and <a href="#">Proofpoint</a> email protection solutions but was stopped by the company’s email attack prevention software.</p> <p>Armorblox said it was able to spot the threat by using natural language understanding (NLU) to comprehend the content and context of the malicious emails and flag them as such.</p> <p>In other phishing news, a recent report by security researchers at Check Point suggested <a href="#">Yahoo replaced DHL</a> as the most imitated brand in the last quarter of 2022, with fake brand emails being responsible for 20% of all phishing attempts recorded in the wild.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Saw a UFO? There’s an app to report that</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d3xjz/saw-a-ufo-you-can-report-it-on-this-app">https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d3xjz/saw-a-ufo-you-can-report-it-on-this-app</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Enigma Labs</a> wants to be the Wikipedia of UFO sightings.</p> <p>The startup launched an invite-only app on Tuesday that will let users report unidentified aerial phenomenon on their phone or through a web portal. The pitch is that the app will make it easier for people to report weird sightings of things in the sky, help sort through obvious bullshit, and organize things on the backend for people researching the topic.</p>

“Traditional methods of managing existing data are highly fragmented and non-standardized, making it difficult to assess the credibility at scale,” a press release announcing the launch of the app said. “Enigma Labs’ AI and deep learning systems unify and standardize data through a rational, scientific approach, within a centralized, independent platform.”

The launch of Enigma Labs comes at a time when public interest in UFOs is at a high not seen in decades. Recent high profile sightings from [credible witnesses](#) in the U.S. Navy helped make the issue popular again. Last year, the Pentagon opened an All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office to study the phenomenon. Politico recently reported that the Pentagon was [partnering](#) with Enigma Labs.

Mark Douglas, Chief Operating Officer at Enigma Labs, told me he’d never personally seen a UFO. “I see these things all the time, right, on Twitter and YouTube,” he said. “And it’s just very hard to say what any one individual setting may or may not be. And that’s part of the reason we’re building this platform.”

The idea is that a person who sees something strange in the sky will be able to use the Enigma Labs app to report it in a standardized way. When a user opens the app, they’re urged to fill out a series of prompts describing what they’ve seen. It starts with the basics (Where did you see this thing and how long was it in the air?) before asking the witness for video or photos of the object and allowing them to fill out a blank prompt where they can tell the whole story.

The app wraps up by asking some standardized questions that read like a UFO-themed Mad Libs. “I saw (number of objects), they were (sphere? triangle? square?) shaped. At its closest, the UAP was (distance) viewed at arms’ length, it was (coin) sized. It had (hovering? streaking?) movement.”

The app analyzes the photos and videos uploaded to it using machine learning, looking for markers of Photoshop or other forms of manipulation. It asks questions, such as if the witness saw a contrail or if they live near an airport, that might help explain what the person saw. It takes all this data and uses AI to assign a score to the report. The higher the score, the more visible and “credible” the report is for Enigma Labs partners with API access.

In a private demo of the app, Enigma Labs walked me through how it all works. “Once we have all this data digitized, standardized, structured in some way, now you can run queries and play around with the data,” Douglas told me. A globe view of the United States filled the screen. Radiation symbols populated the map as well as small pictures, each picture was a data point. Clicking on the picture brought up the individual report.

“What you’re seeing here, in real time, is one of our engineers typing up a query to look up all the sightings within 100 kilometers of a nuclear facility and then sorting those sightings by score,” Douglas said.

According to Enigma Labs, it has already processed historical UFO data and loaded it into its app. All the reports from Project Blue Book, every reported UFO sighting from the last 100 years, and the recent sightings from Navy and Air Force personnel are all already in the system. According to Enigma Labs, that’s about 300,000 sightings. The goal now is to get people using the app to report new sightings.

App users can play around with the data, but official partners will have a higher level access to the API and can do more things with the data. Who are Enigma Labs partners, exactly? It wouldn’t comment on that, nor would it comment directly on the DOD’s reported usage.

Enigma Labs said one of its big goals is eliminating the stigma around reporting the sighting of a UFO.

“The more people report quality sightings, the better we’re able to match those people and have them corroborate and discuss their experience,” Douglas said. “People will be able to relate to each other and form stronger social glue that reduces the stigma and taboo around this topic.”

HEADLINE	01/30 Walmart security operations headquarters
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cybersecuritydive.com/news/walmart-security-operations-headquarters/641450/">https://www.cybersecuritydive.com/news/walmart-security-operations-headquarters/641450/</a>
GIST	<p>BENTONVILLE, Ark. — Walmart wants to be “the world’s most trusted retailer,” Greg Schaffer, a legal executive at the retail giant, said to a handful of journalists seated inside a largely empty hall at the company’s corporate office.</p> <p>The reporters, Cybersecurity Dive included, sat with our breakfasts — catering that could have fed 50 — to listen to a formal, choreographed fireside chat between Schaffer, the company’s chief counsel for cybersecurity and VP of digital trust compliance, and Jerry Geisler, SVP and CISO, about what trust means at Walmart.</p> <p>It was a talk that would have found a home at any technology conference and the first of many held during Walmart’s showcase of its security operations in mid-January. The conversations with more than two dozen members of its security staff and a tour of its facilities illustrated the scope of Walmart’s cyber operations and why it cares so much about security, even if its customers won’t notice.</p> <p>“I’m biased — cybersecurity is always top of mind for me, but I know not everybody has that same perspective,” Geisler said in conversation with Schaffer.</p> <p>“If it is top of mind for a customer, then I want them to be able to look at what we’re doing and have a high degree of confidence that we are meeting the commitments that we have made to them in terms of how we are going to protect their information,” he said.</p> <p>If security is not a priority for a customer, Geisler said, Walmart still wants customers to trust it will do what’s right.</p> <p>Many businesses don’t make security a priority until it’s too late. The costs of cybercrime damage are expected to reach <a href="#">\$8 trillion this year</a>, up from \$6 trillion in 2022, and the World Economic Forum is warning of the potential for global instability following a <a href="#">catastrophic cyber event</a>.</p> <p>Yet, continued <a href="#">investment in business cybersecurity</a> is not guaranteed as the market navigates a downturn.</p> <p>In an era where breaches are the norm and consumers grow apathetic to privacy, an emphasis on security and trust goes underappreciated. Fines imposed by the Federal Trade Commission or the European Union’s data privacy efforts do little to change enterprise treatment of data. Repeat offenders say they are investing in cyber, but additional spending does little to show security cultures can change.</p> <p>For Walmart, its seriousness about security is depicted through its scale. Its cyber hubs have a global footprint, allowing Walmart to run security operations 24/7/365 with the help of shift work and time zones (a security operations center in Bangalore, India complements the schedules of U.S.-based security staff, for example).</p> <p>Each year, those SOCs process an average of six trillion data points each year — data Walmart internalizes and shares with the broader security community. The company also operates a fully accredited forensics lab to aid data recovery, complete with a clean room, specialized X-ray technology and hot-air soldering. And a tour of one of its data centers, where rule-enforcing staff flanked curious guests, illustrated operational redundancy.</p> <p>There’s little room for failure, just failover.</p> <p>Walmart does not share information on how much it spends on cybersecurity, nor does it say what percent of its 20,000 Walmart Global Tech employees — responsible for operating the retailer’s foundational technology — work in infosec. A tour of Walmart’s facilities only hints at the scope of its operations, but an up close look close indicates few companies could independently run at such scale.</p>

Walmart's cybersecurity is not just a best-in-show example. It may be the exception.

That's not to say Walmart's approach to security is unattainable. Rather, what sets its operation apart is how the retailer has fine-tuned its security focus. In the face of a steady stream of threats, knowing exactly what to prioritize and what can wait is a technique businesses can emulate.

### **Behind the screens**

From an outsider's perspective, Walmart Global Tech facilities offer all the bells and whistles of a world-class security operation without the shiny objects of Silicon Valley perks. On-site, there were no scooters, though a trampoline complete with safety nets stood vacant in the corner of one room.

Badge access points and layers of locked doors offered a clue of where physical security met the digital, despite remote or hybrid work options.

The retailer is facing the same obstacles as other companies when it comes to talent: the demand far exceeds the supply of cyber workers, a growing gap that now encompasses [3.4 million openings](#).

Walmart has a leg up on many organizations in terms of resources. It brought in [\\$572.8 billion in revenue](#) in the fiscal year 2022, and it has a \$24.2 billion operating cash flow. But the tenure of its security organization adds a heft of institutional knowledge.

The information security department has well over two decades of history with roots that predate the highest-profile attacks that marked sea changes in industry, whether that's the 2014 hack on Sony or the 2015 power grid attacks in Ukraine.

"Our experience has been that because the company started investing in this space over two decades ago that we've had the advantage of growing and evolving and maturing programs as the company has grown, evolved and matured and moved into businesses," Geisler said.

"That has put us in, I think, the enviable position of having a seat at the table for a long time, to be the trusted partner of our business, and to help guide against missteps," he said.

Walmart's security operations have earned it industry clout, and with that comes the ability to attract experienced talent. Pedigrees marking time spent at Google and JPMorgan Chase, alongside other Fortune 100 companies, were sprinkled among its roster of speakers.

Reputation aside, [Walmart's Live Better U](#) program, which pays 100% of college tuition and books for employees, is aimed at creating a tech talent pipeline, supporting programs in areas including cybersecurity and information technology.

Retention too, factors into its talent strategy. Inside Walmart's corporate office, it wasn't unusual to see years-long tenure with badges proudly declaring time spent in five-year intervals. One expert, Justin Simpson, began his career at Walmart fresh from college more than a decade ago and now serves as a director of data security, with quantum and crypto as part of his purview.

Top of mind for his work is post-quantum cryptography and making sure Walmart has the right security processes in place in the event that a quantum computer is realized.

Like Simpson, some experts and specialists at the company are dedicated to the future, no matter how far off it may seem. Others lead identity access management or cloud security. Bots are another specialty, aiding the company's defense in depth approach to ensure customers can purchase the goods they want.

On average, in a single month, Walmart can block 8.5 million malicious bots.



Far from the generic, harried infosec workers of internet meme fame, each person has a highly specialized role. Every detail of computer engagement — whether corporate staff, store associates or customers — is thought out. Nothing is left to chance or neglect.

### **Outside the network**

Walmart does not silo its security prowess. It works with external information sharing and analysis centers, sharing intel that relates to threats inside and outside its networks.

Walmart works in tight unison with its partners in the National Retail Federation, VP and Deputy CISO Rob Duhart said during a lunchtime roundtable discussion. “We win together.”

NRF and the Retail & Hospitality Information Sharing and Analysis Center [strengthened their collaboration](#) earlier this month to better combat malicious cyberattacks and protect customer data. RH-ISAC found the majority of CISOs, 70%, expect their budgets to increase this year.

Walmart does its “best to continue to partner with our regulatory bodies as well, to make sure that they’re learning from our experience,” Duhart said.

There’s a layered approach to how it views external networks. Where most organizations refer to it as third-party risk, Walmart’s external party risk encompasses the threats at the fourth, fifth, sixth level and beyond. To each, it offers empirical risk measurements too.

Working across its security operations and partnerships teams, “we’re able to prioritize how we attack certain risks in the environment,” Russ Buckley, senior director, risk and compliance, said during a roundtable. Beyond labeling something as generically risky, it can use an internal number to help the business quantify where to invest people or budgets.

“In doing so it allows our business leaders to have an empirical number — not just a guess, not just my favorite friend told me — but they can actually have something they can go and look at and say, ‘This is what we want to do, make that decision,’” Buckley said. “That decision, in turn, supports how we provide all of our services to all of our customers.”

The industry standard common vulnerability scoring system goes through Walmart’s empirical analysis too, which allows the company to determine what risk CVEs could create in its environment.

That’s where threat intelligence sharing comes into play. Walmart has mechanisms in place to determine what risk a threat really poses. Even if a CVE doesn’t affect its networks, it can externally share how it may impact others in the industry.

“We contributed a lot to making sure that other people understand the risk as well and maybe why we’re not seeing that risk,” Buckley said. “And we have some influence on other organizations that may change their security posture based on, ‘Hey, Walmart wasn’t affected, but other companies were, maybe we should look at that.’”

It speaks to Walmart’s robust cyber intelligence program. It consumes information from commercial sources, just as many large organizations do, but it also procures its own threat intelligence.

“We have researchers that are doing things like looking at adversary backend infrastructure, understanding how those threat actors are pivoting,” said Jason O’Dell, VP of security operations, during a roundtable. “Sometimes as a byproduct of that we also see other organizations being targeted by those particular threat actors and we very quickly share that back to the community.”

Household name brand companies see a different attack surface than the average organization, Chris Silva, VP analyst at Gartner, told Cybersecurity Dive in a conversation last year about Walmart’s [use of automation in security](#). “They’re always a bigger target.”



Brands like Walmart may see threats never before seen in the wild and sharing that intel can give other organizations a chance to respond.

### **Influence from above**

Walmart has its own security orbit, and the gravity of that extends to the regulatory realm, where the company wants to help set the tone for what customers can come to expect with privacy.

There's been a steady march toward privacy legislation at the state level, led by California, though a federal mandate is not in place. Those requirements are "pushing us in a direction that we're already going," Schaffer said during the keynote. When those laws come through, "sometimes it's accelerating a roadmap that we have in place and that's a good thing."

"Our goal, again, to be the most trusted retailer, frankly, because we have some businesses that go beyond retail," he said. The goal is to become "the most trusted company."

It's a high bar, yet one that Walmart has the resources to clear. In cybersecurity, one wrong move can take a toll on a company's reputation, but Walmart has the mass to absorb it. Defense is a proactive effort and nothing across its networks is left to chance.

"We don't necessarily focus as much on the scale of Walmart, because we're just used to operating in a big environment," Geisler said in an interview with Cybersecurity Dive during the last conversation of the day. "It's just our state of existence."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Google Fi confirms data breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://techcrunch.com/2023/01/31/google-fi-customer-data-breach/">https://techcrunch.com/2023/01/31/google-fi-customer-data-breach/</a>
GIST	<p>Google's cell network provider <a href="#">Google Fi</a> has confirmed a data breach, likely related to the recent <a href="#">security incident</a> at T-Mobile, which allowed hackers to steal millions of customers' information.</p> <p>In an email sent to customers on Monday, obtained by TechCrunch, Google said that the primary network provider for Google Fi recently informed the company that there had been suspicious activity relating to a third party support system containing a "limited amount" of Google Fi customer data.</p> <p>The timing of the notice — and the fact that Google Fi uses a combination of T-Mobile and U.S. Cellular for network connectivity — suggests the breach is linked to <a href="#">the most recent T-Mobile hack</a>. This breach, disclosed on January 19, allowed intruders access to a trove of personal data belonging to 37 million customers, including billing addresses, dates of birth and T-Mobile account details. The incident marked the eighth time T-Mobile has been hacked since 2018.</p> <p>In the case of the Google Fi's breach, Google says the hackers accessed limited customer information, including phone numbers, account status, SIM card serial numbers, and information related to details about customers' mobile service plan, such as whether they have selected unlimited SMS or international roaming.</p> <p>Google said that the hackers did not take customers' personal information or payment card data, passwords, PINs, or the contents of text messages or calls.</p> <p>While some emails told customers that there is "no action required," at least one Google Fi customer claimed in <a href="#">a Reddit post</a> that their disclosure said that their phone number had been briefly hijacked, known as <a href="#">SIM swapping</a>. Google reportedly told the customer that the intruders had transferred their number for close to two hours, during which they "could have involved the use of your phone number to send and receive phone calls and text messages." This technique is used by hackers to gain access to a victim's other online accounts that are protected by the same, albeit hijacked phone number.</p>

	<p>TechCrunch asked Google whether it could confirm that the incident was linked to the recent T-Mobile breach but has yet to receive a response. It's not immediately clear how many Google Fi subscribers have been affected by the breach. Google hasn't made public how many cell subscribers it has in total.</p> <p>In its email to customers, the company said it is working with the as-yet-unnamed network provider to "identify and implement measures to secure the data on that third-party system and notify everyone potentially impacted." It added that there was no access to Google's systems or any systems overseen by Google.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Tiny WA bank got tangled up with FTX</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-a-tiny-bank-in-a-washington-farming-town-got-tangled-up-with-ftx-11675178539?mod=hp_lead_pos11">https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-a-tiny-bank-in-a-washington-farming-town-got-tangled-up-with-ftx-11675178539?mod=hp_lead_pos11</a>
GIST	<p>When Jean Chalopin applied to buy a tiny bank in Washington state nearly three years ago, he made modest promises to bring not-so-new innovations such as ATM cards to a place with few local banking options.</p> <p>Farmington State Bank's business plan wouldn't change, Mr. Chalopin, a one-time TV and film producer who co-created the "Inspector Gadget" cartoon, assured federal regulators in documents viewed by The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>But it wasn't long before the bank got a new name, Moonstone, and new target customers in the high-risk cryptocurrency and cannabis industries. It also got a new shareholder: Sam Bankman-Fried's crypto-trading firm, Alameda Research LLC.</p> <p>Alameda paid \$11.5 million for a stake in Moonstone at a roughly \$115 million valuation, which was 37 times the \$3.1 million Mr. Chalopin paid for the bank 18 months earlier. Executives from Mr. Bankman-Fried's crypto exchange, FTX, discussed using the bank to offer interest-bearing crypto accounts and lend out depositors' digital assets, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Mr. Bankman-Fried's crypto empire collapsed in November, thrusting the little-known bank into the spotlight. Lawmakers are pressing for information about whether Alameda used FTX customer funds to pay for its stake in the bank. Mr. Chalopin, a pair of Democratic senators noted in a letter to banking regulators last month, chairs Deltec International Group, the crypto-friendly Bahamian bank with close ties to FTX.</p> <p>Last week, the new management team steering FTX through bankruptcy asked a judge to approve a subpoena for records related to Moonstone from Mr. Bankman-Fried and other FTX insiders.</p> <p>The Justice Department in early January seized about \$50 million that an FTX entity held at Moonstone—about 77% of the total deposits the bank reported holding at the end of 2022. Moonstone said it is getting out of crypto and cannabis and returning to its community-banking roots.</p> <p>"It's still the same bank, it just has a cloud over it," said Todd Lobdell, a Farmington resident and former director of the town's public works department.</p> <p>Mr. Chalopin began laying the groundwork to buy Moonstone in the fall of 2019.</p> <p>It had \$8.4 million in assets at the time, largely in the form of loans to farmers in an area where lentils are the cash crop. Its president, Tanya Thygeson, was a lifelong resident of the bank's eponymous hometown. She rose from teller and has held roles as a town paramedic and librarian, according to a local press report on her 2018 promotion.</p> <p>After leaving show business, Mr. Chalopin had found a second act in banking. A native of France, he eventually settled in the Bahamas and amassed a roughly 47% stake in Deltec, according to the purchase</p>

application filed with the Federal Reserve. By early 2020, Deltec had established itself as one of the leading banks to crypto companies, including Tether Holdings Ltd., the issuer of the tether stablecoin.

Farmington would be his next target. A company owned by Mr. Chalopin agreed to buy the bank for \$3.1 million in cash. When asked to list “any significant anticipated changes in services or products” that would result from the transaction, “not applicable” was his lawyer’s answer in the April 2020 application to the Fed.

“Applicant does not intend to change the business plan of the Bank,” the lawyer wrote.

Moonstone would later say that it had pursued an “innovative startup business model” to serve crypto and cannabis businesses since its 2020 acquisition. The bank quickly brought in a new executive team and board members from companies such as fintech startup Revolut Ltd. and crypto exchange Gemini Trust Co.

The application doesn’t reflect confidential discussions the buyers had with regulators or amendments to its business plan following the acquisition, a person close to Moonstone said.

Moonstone’s parent company announced the Alameda investment in March 2022. Dan Friedberg, FTX’s chief regulatory officer, served as a liaison between the two companies, people familiar with the matter said. A lawyer based in Seattle, Wash., Mr. Friedberg had worked for local banks before pivoting to blockchain and becoming an early adviser to Mr. Bankman-Fried.

Alameda was attracted to a Moonstone plan to offer a payments network that would let crypto companies send dollars between Moonstone accounts, people familiar with the matter said. Other crypto-friendly banks, including Silvergate Capital Corp., already offered similar networks.

But the primary motivation for Alameda’s investment in Moonstone was an idea that FTX could offer crypto-yield programs in a way that would bypass Securities and Exchange Commission regulations, people familiar with the matter said. Such programs allow investors to earn interest on their crypto by depositing their digital assets into a common pool. The assets in the pool are then lent out to borrowers, typically sophisticated trading firms that use the crypto to fund various trading strategies.

The SEC has sought to block similar crypto-lending programs offered by companies such as BlockFi Inc. on the grounds that they are unregistered securities. Certain bank-issued investment products are exempted from having to register as securities because banks are subject to a regulatory regime separate from the SEC.

FTX executives were looking at ways to structure a crypto-yield program that Moonstone would legally be able to offer under this exemption, the people said. No such program ever launched, and several companies offering similar crypto-yield programs have gone bust in recent months, leaving millions of depositors uncertain whether they will get their money back.

After Alameda’s investment, Moonstone ballooned. Deposits grew to \$84 million by Sept. 30 from \$12 million at the end of 2021, according to regulatory filings, thanks in large part to FTX. Assets grew to \$99 million from \$18 million over the same period.

Moonstone’s balance sheet was conservative, despite the riskiness of its client base. Around two-thirds of its assets as of Sept. 30 were excess bank reserves that it lends to other banks. Still, Moonstone reported a net loss of \$3.7 million that quarter, worse than the \$537,000 loss from a year earlier.

After FTX and Alameda collapsed, Moonstone sent a notice to its local customers assuring them that their money was safe, Mr. Lobdell said. Yet the bank also explained that it was going to launch its own cryptocurrency.

	<p>Moonstone later distanced itself from its shareholder and largest depositor. The bank placed a hold on FTX's account, citing "an attempt by potentially unauthorized persons to withdraw the funds."</p> <p>Moonstone never launched a payments network. Earlier this month, the bank said it was going back to basics, and the old Farmington name, citing the "impact of recent events in the crypto assets industry and the resultant changing regulatory environment relating to crypto asset businesses."</p>
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## Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Michigan man convicted: support to ISIS</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/31/justice-department-isis-terrorism-conviction-michigan/6791675199589/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/31/justice-department-isis-terrorism-conviction-michigan/6791675199589/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 31 (UPI) -- A Dearborn, Mich., man was convicted by a federal jury for attempting to aid ISIS, the Justice Department announced Tuesday.</p> <p>Ibraheem Izzy Musaibli faces a 50-year prison sentence for conspiring to provide resources to ISIS and for supporting ISIS in Syria from 2015 to 2018. He is also alleged to have received training from the designated terrorist organization while in Syria.</p> <p>The 32-year-old, who is a Michigan native, moved to Yemen in 2015. He traveled to Syria later that year to undergo training in an ISIS camp. There he learned how to handle a machine gun, according to a press release from the Justice Department.</p> <p>Musaibli was captured by Syrian Democratic Forces in 2018 and extradited to the United States to face charges related to acts of terrorism.</p> <p>"Ibraheem Musaibli traveled halfway around the world and joined a vicious, brutal, and violent terrorist organization known -- and proud of -- its barbaric acts of terror," said U.S. Attorney Dawn N. Ison for the Eastern District of Michigan.</p> <p>"Today's verdicts highlight the dedication of this office, along with our law enforcement partners, in pursuing anyone who poses a danger to the United States-no matter where they are located."</p> <p>The verdict comes at the end of a nine-day trial, prosecuted by U.S. District Attorneys for the Eastern District of Michigan.</p> <p>A sentencing date has not been set.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Pakistan: arrests in mosque bombing</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/death-toll-pakistan-mosque-blast-rises-83-hospital-spokesperson-2023-01-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/death-toll-pakistan-mosque-blast-rises-83-hospital-spokesperson-2023-01-31/</a>
GIST	<p>PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Feb 1 (Reuters) - Police investigating a suicide bombing that killed more than 100 people at a Pakistan mosque said on Tuesday that several people had been arrested, and they could not rule out the possibility that the bomber had internal assistance evading security checks.</p> <p>The bombing was the most deadly in a decade to hit Peshawar, a restive northwestern city near the Afghan border, and all but three of those killed were police, making it most suffered by Pakistan's security forces in a single attack in recent history.</p> <p>The bomber struck on Monday as hundreds of worshippers gathered for noon prayers in a mosque that was purpose built for the police and their families living in a highly fortified area.</p>

"We have found some excellent clues, and based on these clues we have made some major arrests," Peshawar Police Chief Ijaz Khan told Reuters.

"We can't rule out internal assistance but since the investigation is still in progress, I will not be able to share more details."

Investigators, who include counter-terrorism and intelligence officials, are focusing on how the attacker managed to breach the military and police checkpoints leading into the Police Lines district, a colonial-era, self-contained encampment in the city centre that is home to middle- and lower-ranking police personnel and their families.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif had said the bomber was in the first row in the prayer hall when he struck. Remains of the attacker had been recovered, provincial Police Chief Moazzam Jah Ansari told Reuters.

"We believe the attackers are not an organised group," he added.

The most active militant group in the area, the Pakistani Taliban, also called Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has denied responsibility for the attack, which no group has claimed so far. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah had told parliament a breakaway faction of the TTP was to blame.

The blast demolished the upper storey of the mosque. It was is the deadliest in Peshawar since twin suicide bombings at All Saints Church killed scores of worshippers in September 2013, in what remains the deadliest attack on the country's Christian minority.

Peshawar sits on the edge of the Pashtun tribal lands, a region mired in violence for the past two decades.

The TTP is an umbrella group for Sunni and sectarian Islamist factions opposed to the government in Islamabad. The group has recently stepped up attacks against police.

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HEADLINE	01/31 US deploy R9X Hellfire in Yemen?
SOURCE	<a href="https://taskandpurpose.com/tech-tactics/hellfire-r9x-missile-ninja-bomb-yemen/">https://taskandpurpose.com/tech-tactics/hellfire-r9x-missile-ninja-bomb-yemen/</a>
GIST	<p>Did the United States deploy a secretive missile that's basically an anvil covered in swords to target a vehicle in an airstrike in Yemen on Monday? All signs point to: well, probably.</p> <p>Turkish state-run news network Andalou Agency <a href="#">reported</a>, citing a local Yemeni official, that three "suspected al-Qaeda militants" were killed in a U.S. drone strike in the Wadi Ubaidah district of Yemen's Marib province.</p> <p>Based on photos of the scene of the strike <a href="#">obtained</a> by Al Aan TV, an Arab-language TV network based in Dubai, the target vehicle was shredded from the roof in rather than destroyed outright in an explosion — a telltale sign of a strike involving the U.S. government's secret AGM-114 R9X Hellfire missile.</p> <p>As Task &amp; Purpose has <a href="#">previously reported</a>, the R9X variant of the Hellfire features a kinetic warhead rather than an explosive payload, releasing a halo of six razor-sharp blades upon impact to eviscerate a target with greater precision than the large explosion that comes from its more conventional cousins.</p> <p>First <a href="#">publicized</a> by the Wall Street Journal in 2019 and colloquially known as the "flying Ginsu" or "ninja bomb," the R9X was purportedly the result of collaboration between the Defense Department and Central Intelligence Agency with the intention of reducing the potential for civilian casualties that might accompany a traditional Hellfire strike.</p> <p>Indeed, the R9X appears to have become the U.S. government's preferred method of precision strikes. Indeed, the CIA used the R9X to eliminate Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a packed neighborhood in Kabul, Afghanistan <a href="#">this past August</a>, and purported R9X strikes involving alleged terrorism trainers and</p>

	<p>organizers have been <a href="#">documented across Syria</a> in the years since the missile's existence was first made public.</p> <p>It's unclear whether the CIA or a Joint Special Operations Command task force, among others, was responsible for the strike. U.S. Central Command did not respond to request for comment from Task &amp; Purpose, <a href="#">telling</a> Stars &amp; Stripes that the combatant command had "no operational reporting at the time of this incident in Yemen."</p> <p>The U.S. military has enjoyed fluctuating involvement in Yemen since the start of the Houthi insurgency there in 2014.</p> <p>While U.S. involvement has remained primarily focused on the (<a href="#">controversial</a>) provisioning of weapons and logistical support to Saudi Arabia, U.S. President Joe Biden <a href="#">confirmed</a> last year that "a small number" of U.S. military personnel remain deployed to Yemen "to conduct operations against [al-Qaeda] in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS."</p> <p>"The United States military continues to work closely with the Republic of Yemen government and regional partner forces to degrade the terrorist threat posed by those groups," Biden <a href="#">said</a> in a letter to then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi in June.</p> <p>Indeed, the strike in Yemen is yet another reminder of the lingering reach of America's Global War on Terrorism despite the end of the 20-year "forever war" in Afghanistan in August 2021. News of the strike came less than a week after U.S. Africa Command <a href="#">announced</a> that U.S. forces in Somalia "conducted a successful counterterrorism operation" against Islamic Group leader Bilal al-Sudani there, an operation that came on the tail end of <a href="#">twin air strikes</a> that killed more than 30 al-Shabaah fighters there.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Somalia: al-Shabab loses grip; more attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://northafricapost.com/64892-al-shabab-looses-its-grip-on-somalia-yet-more-terrorist-attacks-are-expected.html">https://northafricapost.com/64892-al-shabab-looses-its-grip-on-somalia-yet-more-terrorist-attacks-are-expected.html</a>
GIST	<p>Al-Shabab has been on a gradual retreat in Somalia since the announcement of a "total war" against the al-Qaida-affiliated militant group by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in August 2022, and, according to experts, this could be the beginning of al-Shabab's end.</p> <p>Mohamud announced the "total war" against the group days after it staged a deadly hotel siege in Mogadishu, killing at least 21 people and wounding more than 100 others. The decision to increase Somali government military operations in July came as local clans in central Somalia were revolting against the presence and the oppression of al-Shabab in their territories. Al-Shabab has since reportedly ceded territories and major towns in the central Somali regions, with government officials saying more than 2,000 al-Shabab fighters have been killed. The Somali government is now preparing to launch new battlefronts in southern parts of the country, Somalia's defense minister said Friday (27 January).</p> <p>"Since the government offensive began with the support of local citizens, who are fed up with the group's oppressions, al-Shabab has been losing territories and former strongholds in central regions," says Ismail Dahir Osman, former deputy commander of Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency.</p> <p>"Thanks to Somali government military operations backed by local clan militias and foreign partners, including the United States," he said. But even if the jihadi group is now damaged by multiple defeats and its retreat continues, the Somali government acknowledges that the dangerous ideology is very much alive and expects warn of more terrorist attacks planned and commissioned by the group.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Italy arrests 3 linked to slain terrorist</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/2242821/world">https://www.arabnews.com/node/2242821/world</a>



<b>GIST</b>	<p>LONDON: Three Tunisians linked to a terrorist who killed a dozen people in Germany in 2016 have been arrested by Italian police for facilitating illegal immigration, Italian news agency ANSA reported.</p> <p>The trio were arrested during nationwide raids in Italy on more than 40 premises linked to a transnational gang enabling illegal immigration.</p> <p>Two of the men were subsequently placed in pre-trial detention, while the third was ordered into house arrest.</p> <p>Police tied the three to Anis Amri, a Tunisian who plowed into Christmas market crowds in Berlin using a truck seven years ago, killing 12 people and injuring dozens.</p> <p>After going on the run following the attack, Amri was killed in a shootout with Milan police four days later.</p> <p>Authorities carried out raids on the illegal immigration gang in Ancona, Fermo, Ferrara, Catanzaro, Modena, Macerata, Siracusa and Verona.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 NYC woman indicted: funding terror group</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.audacy.com/1010wins/news/local/ues-woman-indicted-for-using-cryptocurrency-to-fund-syrian-terrorist-group">https://www.audacy.com/1010wins/news/local/ues-woman-indicted-for-using-cryptocurrency-to-fund-syrian-terrorist-group</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p><b>NEW YORK (1010 WINS)</b> — A 43-year-old Upper East Side woman was indicted for using cryptocurrency to fund and launder money for a Syrian terrorist group, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg announced Tuesday.</p> <p>After a year-and-a-half-long investigation, the NYPD Intelligence Bureau and Manhattan DA’s Counter Terrorism Program charged Victoria Jacobs for supporting Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, a Syrian paramilitary organization opposed to the Bashar al-Assad regime.</p> <p>The group is designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. state department.</p> <p>Between September 2018 and June 2019, Jacobs allegedly sent more than \$5,000 to the group’s training wing Mahalma Tactical.</p> <p>She’s also accused of using Bitcoin to launder more than \$10,000 on behalf of Mahalma Tactical and sending a U.S. Army Improvised Munitions Handbook to facilitate bomb making.</p> <p>“This case marks the first time that terrorism financing is being prosecuted in New York State Court and is one of the rare cases worldwide where cryptocurrency is alleged to have financed terrorism,” said Bragg. “This complex case demonstrates the depth of knowledge and resources this Office has to combat terrorism and extremism in New York and throughout the globe.”</p> <p>Jacobs was charged in a New York Supreme court for supporting an act of terrorism, money laundering, conspiracy and weapons possession.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 Sudan releases killer of USAID employee</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://sudantribune.com/article270207/">https://sudantribune.com/article270207/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>January 31, 2023 (KHARTOUM) – This week, Sudanese authorities released Abdel Raouf Abu Zaid Hamza who was convicted of killing John Granville, an American diplomat working for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and his driver in Khartoum exactly 15 years ago. A Sudanese court found him guilty and sentenced him to death along with three other participants.</p>



**On what legal basis was Hamza released?**

The high court issued a ruling that freed Hamza after inquiring with the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and confirming that Granville's family received financial compensation as part of a larger settlement package finalized in late 2020 involving multiple terrorist incidents, his brother Abd al-Malik told Sudan Tribune.

**What were the details of the settlement?**

The United States announced in March 2021 that it had received \$335 million from Sudan to compensate the victims of the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the bombing of the USS Cole destroyer in 2000 as well as Granville's assassination. The specific amount received by his family was not disclosed. In return, the United States removed Sudan from the list of states that sponsor terrorism and reinstated its sovereign immunity.

**Why are some suspicious of the motives behind the ruling?**

There is a strong belief within some political groups that participated in the December 2018 uprising that brought about the demise of the Bashir regime that the High Court is dominated by Islamic-leaning judges who have ascended to their positions by virtue of their ideology.

**Did the family of the Sudanese victims pardon the killers?**

Abd al-Malik confirmed to {Sudan Tribune} that the father of the Sudanese victim Abd al-Rahman Abbas Rahma has agreed to forfeit the demand for the death penalty to the killers in 2009 in response to mediation led by Sheikh Muhammad Sayed Haj, a prominent member of the Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyah group, in which Abd al-Raouf's late father held the position of president.

"Since that pardon removed the death penalty, the prison sentence remained until the settlement was completed in 2021. It is not clear to us why Hamza's release was delayed since that time, as his accomplices escaped from prison, and he became the only one under punishment."

Lawyers in Khartoum indicate that Hamza was not released at the time because he was serving a prison sentence for the "common right," and he was released after it was completed on January 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Did the man renounce extremist ideology?**

Sudan Tribune met with Hamza on the morning of his release at his home in Omdurman, but he declined to give any press interviews, while his brother confirmed that the man-made deep intellectual revisions and renounced his extreme views after dialogues initiated with him by the late Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Hajj.

"I assure you, he has now been completely changed as a result of those revisions, and he has announced that he has completely rejected those ideas," his brother said.

**US State Department responds:**

According to Reuters, the US State Department said it was aware of reports that Hamza had been released.

"Our embassy is engaging government officials to obtain more information. We call for full accountability for the murders of John Granville and his Sudanese colleague Abdelrahman Abbas Rahma," a State Department spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that Hamza remains listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by Washington. He has been so designated since 2013.

John Granville and his Sudanese driver Abdel-Rahman Abbas Rahma were shot dead on the 2008 New Year's Eve by men believed to be belonging to an Islamic militant group Ansar al-Tawhid which claimed responsibility for the killing.

	<p>Sudan hosted al-Qaeda deceased leader Osama bin Laden and leftist militant Carlos the Jackal in the early 1990s and became a hub for Islamic movements, which led to international isolation, as the United States classified it as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993.</p> <p>Sudan's position changed in wake of the 9/11 attacks and al-Bashir began to cooperate with the United States to combat terrorism.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Somalia sends recruits abroad for training</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-somalia-sends-thousands-of-army-recruits-abroad-for-training-/6941868.html">https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-somalia-sends-thousands-of-army-recruits-abroad-for-training-/6941868.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Somali government has sent thousands of military recruits to nearby countries for training to strengthen the army for its war against al-Shabab militants, according to the national security adviser for the Somali president.</p> <p>In an exclusive interview on January 26 with VOA Somali, Hussein Sheikh-Ali said Somalia has sent 3,000 soldiers each to Eritrea and Uganda in the past few weeks. He said an additional 6,000 recruits will be sent to Ethiopia and Egypt.</p> <p>"We want to complete making 15,000 soldiers ready within 2023," Ali told VOA in the one-on-one interview in Washington where he met with U.S. officials to seek more support for Somalia.</p> <p>The news comes as a report by the Mogadishu-based think tank Heritage Institute for Political Studies (HIPS) cast doubt that the government will meet its December 2024 deadline to have 24,000 soldiers ready to assume security responsibilities when troops from the African Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) are scheduled to leave.</p> <p>"This timetable is ambitious because the Somali security services are unlikely to be fully autonomous by then, nor is it likely that al-Shabab will have been militarily defeated," the report said.</p> <p>"The deadline and the fact the army is in a war while at the same time they are being rebuilt ... we argue it's a tight deadline," said Afyare Elmi, executive director of HIPS and the report's coauthor. "It will be difficult to meet."</p> <p>The report noted that in November, the Somali government asked ATMIS to delay the first drawdown of 2,000 soldiers by six months, from December 2022 to June 30, 2023.</p> <p>Ali said the delay was requested because the troops Somalia is expecting to take over from ATMIS are in training abroad. He also said the government doesn't want to disrupt military operations against al-Shabab in central Somalia, as the areas ATMIS troops would vacate will have to be taken over by Somali forces.</p> <p>The Somali government recently brought home most of the 5,000 soldiers who were trained in Eritrea. Ali defended the decision to send more recruits there, calling the plan "transparent." He said the government is ahead of its training schedule.</p> <p>He said the government will have 24,000 troops trained and fully equipped by next year.</p> <p>"There is no reason for ATMIS to stay or to continue to stay in Somalia," he added.</p> <p>Ali also made a bold prediction that the government will defeat the militant group by next summer.</p> <p>"Our ... primary goal is that in the summer of 2024, before June or July, that there will be no al-Shabab person occupying a territory in Somalia. You can note that down," he said.</p> <p><b>Financial challenges</b></p>

The Somali army, working with local clan militia, succeeded in taking several towns and villages in central Somalia from al-Shabab in 2022.

Despite these successes, Somali security forces have other challenges, including financial constraints, and capability and training gaps, the HIPS report said.

The Somali parliament recently approved its biggest-ever budget for 2023 at \$967 million, but domestic revenue is very low, and two-thirds of the budget comes from external support. That budget allocates \$113 million for the national army.

"To date, the Somali authorities alone cannot afford the army they want," the report said.

Elmi said building an army without a budgetary plan could result in an unsustainable situation.

"An army is more than paying a salary. So many expenses come with it," he said.

"We have only emphasized sustainability. We are not specifying a number. We are saying they must be affordable. That affordability is coming from the capacity of the state."

### **Capability gaps**

The report said ongoing military operations highlighted two major capability gaps for the Somali National Army (SNA). It says the troops suffered from many casualties over the years from improvised explosive devices, lack of equipment and armored personnel carriers, and a shortage of explosive ordnance disposal teams.

The report said Somali army units trained by the United States, known as Danab (Lightning), and Turkey, known as Gorgor (Eagle), are now "reasonably well equipped," but the regular army units are only marginally better equipped than the Ma'awisley, the local clan militias supporting government forces.

"This inequality is so pronounced that officials now talk about the SNA being effectively two armies — one that is mobile, and one that is largely stationary," the report says.

The report also highlights struggles in generating and deploying "hold" forces that can stabilize newly recaptured areas.

"There is an important difference between pushing al-Shabab forces out of areas and holding them long enough to deliver a real peace dividend to the local inhabitants," it said.

The report further said al-Shabab made stabilization efforts much harder by destroying schools, medical facilities, wells and other important infrastructure.

Security and intelligence experts say it's the responsibility of other government agencies such as police, intelligence and regional paramilitary forces to relieve the army in stabilizing recovered territories.

"To hold the areas seized, to defend themselves and to go forward and seize more territory is difficult for them, both quantity and quality," said Brigadier General Abdi Hassan Hussein, a former intelligence officer and former police commander of Puntland region.

Hussein said the capacity of Somali soldiers has been affected by a decades-long international weapons embargo on Somalia. He said the United Nations and other stakeholders must look into the issue.

"If the stakeholders do not play a role in this fight and it fails, [peace] will be far away," Hussein said.

### **Al-Shabab strategy**

Al-Shabab is unwilling to fight the government's war. It wants to fight its own war and is trying to draw the government into its war, experts on the militant group said.

The militant group has been using an older strategy to withdraw from territories as government forces and local militias approach. But the group's fighters are not going far, according to former al-Shabab official and defector Omar Mohamed Abu Ayan.

"They are not defending the towns, which they used to do," said Abu Ayan. "Instead of moving further away, they are hovering around in the forests nearby the towns, and then they send suicide bombers back into the town."

Abu Ayan also said al-Shabab started withdrawing its money from banks after the government froze funds and shut down hundreds of accounts suspected of having links to the group.

"They developed hostility towards the banks," he said. "They also called the companies and businesses and asked them to give the money they were supposed to pay them several years in advance, so that they can accumulate more money. They have also reduced their expenses."

The Somali government announced that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is hosting the heads of states from the "front-line" countries of Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti this week to discuss the war against al-Shabab. Defense ministers and army chiefs from the four countries met in Mogadishu on Tuesday ahead of Wednesday's summit.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Far-right extremist threat to military
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cfr.org/blog/violent-far-right-terrorist-threat-us-military">https://www.cfr.org/blog/violent-far-right-terrorist-threat-us-military</a>
GIST	<p>As violent far-right extremism has risen to the fore as a significant national security concern over the past decade, researchers have increasingly discussed the pernicious infiltration of extremists into the U.S. military and among veterans. These extremists either join the service in order to gain combat and logistical training, or are recruited once their service ends by radical groups preying on the <a href="#">combination</a> of trauma and loss of purpose and community that often plagues veterans (or first inspires military service).</p> <p>The bulk of this research has focused on the <a href="#">threat</a> that radicalized soldiers and veterans pose to the American public. Pointing to Timothy McVeigh—a decorated army veteran who perpetrated the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing—as a worst-case scenario of extremist ideology fusing with military experience, researchers have warned that ignoring extremism in the military will inevitably harm American communities. The <a href="#">prevalence</a> of veterans participating on January 6, coupled with a 2020 <i>Military Times</i> poll that <a href="#">found</a> that “more than half of minority service members say they have personally witnessed examples of white nationalism or ideologically-driven racism within the ranks in recent months,” has compounded concerns. This led the Department of Defense (DOD) under the Joe Biden administration to implement a <a href="#">range of measures</a> to address the issue, which also alienated a swathe of <a href="#">veterans</a> who felt the finger-pointing did not reflect their own experiences of a diverse and vibrant military and unfairly demonized the overwhelming majority of veterans who served honorably and patriotically, with no extremist inclinations.</p> <p>But underreported in this story is the threat that far-right extremists pose directly to the military itself—to soldiers, to readiness, and to recruitment.</p> <p>The danger posed by far-right extremists to the U.S. military begins with insider threats. In June 2020, a private in the 173rd Airborne Brigade was <a href="#">arrested</a> for plotting an attack on his own unit. A white supremacist linked to the British satanic cult Order of the Nine Angles, Ethan Melzer released classified troop movements to the group, hoping to help facilitate an al-Qaeda attack on their position during a deployment to Turkey. He did not care if he himself was killed, as he “<a href="#">would've died successfully</a>,” Melzer had joined the military to advance the group’s neo-Nazi activities. “It’s great for training,” the would-be terrorist had <a href="#">written</a>, explaining his decision to enlist. “All of these places the vast majority deserve to be</p>

burned.” In charging documents, John C. Demers, the assistant attorney general for national security in the Donald Trump administration, [said](#), “Our women and men in uniform risk their lives for our country, but they should never face such peril at the hands of one of their own.” Melzer’s case demonstrates that extremists in the ranks also pose a [counterintelligence](#) problem for the Pentagon.

In 2011, four U.S. Army soldiers, who had formed a militia called Forever Enduring Always Ready, [killed](#) a recently discharged soldier for fear he would betray their plans to assassinate President Barack Obama and overthrow the government. They had also planned to kidnap army officers and take over Fort Stewart, GA. One of the soldiers had [relayed](#) fantasies of committing “active shooter situations” at the base, and had “mapped out the sewer system for use in a sniper assault.” In June 2006, Airman First Class Andrew Dornan was [dishonorably discharged](#) for messages glorifying Adolf Hitler and for threatening to detonate an explosive on a military base. And another [insider attack](#) in Syria last year, which injured four troops, was not definitively linked to an ideology but further underscored the threat that insiders can pose. Seemingly understanding the threat, the U.S. Army [lists](#) “engaging in paramilitary training with radical or extremist organizations, either home or abroad” as one of its “Indicators of a Potential Insider Threat.” Allies have faced similar issues. [Germany](#) has also suffered from rising extremism in the ranks, and was even forced to [dismantle](#) an elite special forces unit because of far-right infiltration, extremists [storing](#) materiel on military bases, and the threat it posed to the country. Meanwhile, an officer in the Italian carabinieri was [arrested](#) as part of a plot to attack a NATO base.

But the far-right terrorist threat against the military does not just come from active insiders. In March 2010, for instance, a [9/11 truther](#) with an eclectic blend of anti-government views and a history of mental health issues opened fire at the Pentagon, wounding two police officers. In 1997, two militia members—neither of them veterans—were [arrested](#) for plotting an attack on Fort Hood, TX, believing it was being used to train Chinese soldiers. And James Mason, a longtime neo-Nazi and advisor to the violent American neo-Nazi group [Atomwaffen Division](#), was militantly opposed to the military and to the concept of service. “Besides—if you are a young White Man or Woman,” Mason wrote in his *SIEGE* newsletter, “do YOU wish to be drafted into any of the services alongside the dregs of society and under Black officers, possibly to be sent to DIE in fabricated wars, possibly to be sent—a la Little Rock—to violently suppress your own White Brothers and Sisters? No, let the military continue to crumble as it is doing for it is merely one more instrument of terror and coercion in the hands of the Enemy.”

Disillusioned veterans of U.S. wars abroad, meanwhile, could also turn their rage against the government they once represented. As an FBI assessment [warned](#) [PDF] in 2008, “White supremacists more often interpret the Iraq War as an ‘Israeli war,’ or a ‘Zionist-led Iraqi war,’ and direct their hostile rhetoric against the perceived ‘near enemy’—the hostile ‘Zionist Occupational Government’ (ZOG)—at home.” Should civil war ever erupt again in the United States, as many on the violent far right [desire](#), veterans in domestic extremist groups could provide the sharp end of the spear. “Right now, any white supremacist in Iraq is getting live fire, guerilla warfare experience,” a former Hammerskin racist skinhead and Marine veteran [said](#) over a decade ago. “But any white supremacist in Iraq who’s a Green Beret or a Navy SEAL or Marine Recon, he’s doing covert stuff that’s far above and beyond convoy protection and roadblocks. And if he comes back and decides at some point down the road that it’s race war time, all that training and combat experience he’s received could easily turn around and bite this country in the ass.” There is precedent for such conflict: the American Civil War, after all, was defined by white supremacists killing members of the U.S. military.

Extremism also poses a range of dangers to honorably discharged veterans already [suffering](#) with post-traumatic stress or substance abuse problems. Suicides rates are perilously high in the veteran community, and some violent far-right extremists, such as Oath Keepers founder (and former Army paratrooper) Stewart Rhodes, have [pointed](#) to their movement as filling an important role in providing purpose and belonging to those leaving service and struggling to readjust to civilian life. But extremism, and a life of hatred and possibly violence against the government they once served, hardly seems like an answer. Rhodes himself was [convicted](#) for seditious conspiracy for his role in the lead-up to January 6; the end result of such organizing is rarely a sense of belonging, but often further violence and, ultimately, incarceration.

Beyond the terrorism threat to the military itself, extremist elements within the ranks also pose a threat to readiness and cohesiveness. In one of its more controversial regulations, the military prohibits “active” participation in extremist groups, but avoids policing membership—an effort to regulate acts instead of beliefs. “Seriously? You want to be in a foxhole with a guy who’s a member of the KKK? Is that really what we want to do here?” one retired army major general [responded](#), incredulously. “The idea of service members having to be in close proximity to card-carrying members of the Proud Boys, as long as they don’t ‘march,’ that just doesn’t get it.” Elsewhere, political disagreements with the commander in chief can lead to unrest. For instance, the commanding general of the Oklahoma National Guard, in opposition to the Pentagon’s COVID vaccine mandate, [declared](#) that his commander in chief was not, in fact, President Biden, but instead Oklahoma’s Republican governor. Such discord undermines the Guard’s very purpose—its preparedness to defend the United States from invasion. There is also a history of white supremacists stealing U.S. military property for use in the far-right movement. In 2007, for instance, two 82nd Airborne Division privates were [jailed](#) for trying to sell stolen ballistic vests and a combat helmet (and [offering](#) a Humvee and howitzer) to an FBI agent they believed to be a white supremacist.

Far-right extremists also likely threaten the military’s image and attractiveness at a time when [recruitment is already low](#). Ensuring racism has no quarter is [essential](#) to ensuring the military retains its [attractiveness](#) to would-be recruits. “Far-right nationalism in the U.S. military and veteran community has a destructive effect on civil-military relations and how the American people view the armed forces,” [writes](#) Jeff McCausland, retired army colonel, adding, “It is corrosive to morale and security among military personnel.” One must also consider the reputational hit the United States and its military could take among foreign partners when white supremacists act out. Some white supremacists [claim](#) to join the military for the opportunity to kill people of color abroad and at home, and could commit [atrocities](#) on deployment, undermining the mission.

Unfortunately, comprehensive data on the extent of extremist infiltration of the military is lacking. A recent [report](#) by the Anti-Defamation League found that the Oath Keepers had at least 373 active law enforcement employees and at least 117 active duty military servicepeople, but those numbers both seem low given that the Oath Keepers organization has up to 38,000 members and was founded explicitly to appeal to veterans. Another estimate [suggested](#) that around 25 percent of militia members came from a military background. A decade ago, the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement [claimed](#) it had 190 members in the services. Meanwhile the *Military Times* continues to [release](#) and publicly report on annual polls revealing eye-opening reports of white supremacy in the services. Although these numbers are concerning enough, without more conclusive data, it remains hard to gain a complete understanding of the threat.

Conversely, data is made less critical by the violent far-right’s enduring [lone actor](#) strategy, where acts of violence are frequently perpetrated not by groups but by networked individuals—like Melzer, who did not need any white supremacist brothers-in-arms in his unit in order to plot his attack. Lone actor violence underscores an observation made by a former army criminal investigator. “The numbers might be small,” Carter F. Smith [said](#), “but they are like a drop of cyanide in your drink. They can do a lot of damage.” Efforts to counter extremism in the ranks are therefore a matter of national defense. As a Center for Strategic and International Studies brief [concluded](#), “The DOD and law enforcement agencies should conceptualize efforts to counter domestic extremism as an issue of self-defense and support for their personnel.”

And even beyond the threats to the military and its readiness and recruitment, violent far-right extremism is simply anathema to the concept of a national military protecting a diverse country. As Trent Kelly, Republican congressman from Mississippi and major general in the Army National Guard, [said](#) during a February 2020 House Armed Services subcommittee hearing on white supremacy in the military, “no group is more diverse or culturally integrated than our United States military. None. Anywhere. We must keep it that way.”

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HEADLINE	01/31 Extremists raise \$6M on crowdfunding sites
SOURCE	<a href="https://time.com/6251612/extremism-crowdfunding-report/">https://time.com/6251612/extremism-crowdfunding-report/</a>



Extremists raised more than \$6.2 million for their activities on crowdfunding sites between 2016 and 2022, according to a new [report](#) published Tuesday by the Anti-Defamation League.

The analysis of 324 fundraising campaigns found that white supremacists, neo-Nazis, militias, QAnon conspiracists, and far-right groups like the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys were able to raise millions of dollars across 10 fundraising websites. Some of these donations were used to directly fund attacks or violent events, the ADL found, as well to pay for propaganda and the legal defense of their members. Despite being prohibited by most of these sites' policies, these campaigns were able to promote extremist rhetoric, from white-supremacist ideologies to anti-Semitic conspiracies, according to the analysis.

"Our findings are very significant, but we're probably only scratching the surface on this," Mark Dwyer, an investigator for the ADL's Center on Extremism who monitors extremist financing online, tells TIME. "Extremists are quick to co-opt other platforms and financial technologies... So when they are de-platformed, they're going to jump to the next thing."

Two of the most prominent groups involved in Jan. 6, the anti-government [Oath Keepers militia](#) and the far-right Proud Boys, were able to raise at least \$879,600 on these crowdfunding sites after being charged with seditious conspiracy, according to the analysis.

The vast majority of the funds—\$5.4 million, or 86%—were raised on GiveSendGo, a Christian [crowdfunding website](#) that has become a "singularly important platform of the extremist fundraising ecosystem," according to the report.

While its official policies ban any campaigns "that promote hate, violence, racial discrimination or the financial exploitation of a crime," at least 230 of the 324 extremism-linked campaigns tracked by the ADL's Center on Extremism were hosted on GiveSendGo. The site's lax moderation policies have made it a haven for extremist-linked causes that would be blocked on more mainstream sites. "They pride themselves on being what they call a censorship-free crowdfunding platform, and they take that to the extent of being absolutist in that stance," says Dwyer.

In recent years, the site has hosted fundraising campaigns for white supremacists who rallied in Charlottesville in 2017 as well as for the legal defense of Jan. 6 insurrectionists. GiveSendGo drew national attention last year when it hosted campaigns for the Canadian trucker protest against vaccine mandates after GoFundMe shut them down. Leaked data shared with TIME last year by DDoS Secrets, a whistleblower non-profit which obtained the data after an apparent hack, showed that roughly 75% of the funds raised for the 74 GiveSendGo campaigns that have brought in more than \$100,000 have gone to controversial right-wing causes, and sometimes extremist ones.

[A TIME investigation](#) last year showed that turning a blind eye to these campaigns also paid off for the site, and provides an incentive to continue hosting them when mainstream crowdfunding platforms won't. According to TIME's analysis of the leaked GiveSendGo data, the platform itself received at least \$2.6 million in voluntary tips or "gifts" from more than 8,000 fundraisers since July 2017.

Jacob Wells, the co-founder of GiveSendGo, disputed the report's findings, arguing the ADL does not define "extremist" and that he allowed the hosting of campaigns for the legal defense of individuals charged with attacking the U.S. Capitol because they were "innocent until proven guilty" by the judicial system.

"They might even have some extremist views, but I think many people have views that someone else might consider extreme. It's such an arbitrary thing," Wells tells TIME. He said GiveSendGo's team monitors for illegal activity. "How do you maximize freedom for people, but still not allow crazy things to be spoken on your platform?" he adds.

While GiveSendGo remains relatively obscure, bigger crowdfunding platforms have hosted extremist campaigns as well. Extremists raised at least \$580,000 on GoFundMe, the largest mainstream crowdfunding site, according to the report. Most of those funds were raised by a group that calls itself the

	Black Hebrew Israelites, which raised funds for anti-Semitic documentaries and other propaganda, according to the ADL.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 UK teen jailed 11yrs: racist content videos</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7zxkd/buffalo-shooting-neo-nazi-video-uk">https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7zxkd/buffalo-shooting-neo-nazi-video-uk</a>
GIST	<p>A U.K. teenager has been sentenced to 11 and a half years behind bars for creating racist content that was heavily referenced by the neo-Nazi who live-streamed himself murdering Black people in a Buffalo grocery store.</p> <p>Daniel John Harris, 19, will spend the next decade behind bars for creating neo-Nazi video propaganda that pushed for terrorism. Harris and his work were referenced at least seven times by the shooter who live-streamed himself murdering ten people during a mass shooting at a grocery store in May 2022. It was also alleged that the man who shot up a gay nightclub in Colorado, killing five and injuring 17, consumed them.</p> <p>Harris was arrested on May 16, 2022, two days after the Buffalo attack, and was found guilty in December. He was sentenced late last week. It's further evidence of the transnational and deadly nature of the modern white supremacy movement and how difficult it can be for law enforcement.</p> <p>Harris' videos were directly referenced by the Buffalo mass murderer in the lengthy diary he kept in the days leading up to the mass shooting. At one point in the shooter's online diary, he wrote "Shout out to (Harris' online name,) thank you for your service."</p> <p>Authorities said Harris knew the deadly impact he was having.</p> <p>"The threat he posed became such that we had to act in order to ensure the safety of the wider public. The reference to one of his videos in the prelude to the Buffalo attack is a case in point," said Counter-Terrorism Detective Inspector Chris Brett. "Harris could see the reaction his videos were getting. This was not a one-off, this was not a game, this was a concerted effort to generate a following and influence people."</p> <p>Police alleged that Harris also tried to use a 3D printer to print parts in a "crude attempt" to create a handgun.</p> <p>Experts have long been sounding the alarm of an international network of propagandists attempting to radicalize and push people into action.</p> <p>"Harris' arrest shows the international nature of the violent online extreme right, especially the subset of individuals who glorify attackers such as the Christchurch terrorist," Joshua Fisher-Birch, an <a href="#">analyst on the far-right at the Counter-Extremism Project</a>, told VICE News. "While many of these individuals are concerned with committing attacks in their area, they are also part of this online community that seeks to encourage violence in other locations in the name of white supremacy."</p> <p>Fisher-Birch told VICE News there have been similar cases of online propagandists being arrested and charged for their work trying to inspire far-right extremists worldwide. For example, in November 2022, a Slovakian man was sentenced <a href="#">to six years for his involvement in terrorism</a> and was, as Fisher-Birch puts it, "an important player within the international neo-Nazi accelerationist online community and spread information helpful in committing terrorist attacks." Neo-Nazi terror groups like The Base and Atomwaffen have <a href="#">had members belonging to cells</a> located in North America, Europe, Scandinavia, and Australia.</p> <p>"The issue is that around the globe, there are individuals who subscribe to the same or similar conspiracy theories and ideologies and feel they have the same group of enemies and either want to take violent action against them or encourage or facilitate others to do so," said Fisher-Birch.</p>

Remnants of Harris' online footprint can still be found, many of his videos remain available on video streaming platforms that trumpet lax moderation as a selling point. Videos he created include a feature film-length video celebrating the Christchurch shooter, as well as anti-vaccine and COVID conspiracy videos. The final video he made celebrated the Buffalo killings. An account associated with the Buffalo shooter on a neo-Nazi video platform only liked one video and it was one where Harris explicitly called for killings of "subhumans."

During sentencing, the judge overseeing the case described Harris as a "highly dangerous" young man who created "vile" work, and that "what (the killers) did was no more than what you intended others to do."

"You intended to encourage terrorism, and it's plain that what was being encouraged was lethal, racist, and antisemitic violence, as well as violence against the gay community," said Judge Patrick Field KC, according [to the BBC](#).

Police in the United Kingdom have been aggressively investigating and charging online neo-Nazis connected to networks such as the one described above. Many of the young men, like Harris, have been teenagers, a trend that was recently described [by some experts as](#) "extremely alarming." Brett said it's "no secret that across the country we are seeing more and more young people hitting the radar of counter-terrorism police, especially those who are displaying extreme right-wing views."

"Not only did he create and share offensive posts and videos, but he also tried (and failed) to make a gun," said Brett. "While not all individuals have the means to act upon their words, in the online space, they can easily spread to inspire others who do."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Pakistan grapples w/deadly terror attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/asia/pakistan-mosque-peshawar-terrorism.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/world/asia/pakistan-mosque-peshawar-terrorism.html</a>
GIST	<p>A suicide bomber's blast ended more than 100 lives in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, devastating a mosque in a supposedly secure sector of the city, and sending smoke plumes into the sky and panic through the streets.</p> <p>But more than that: The attack on Monday knocked a terrorism-scarred city back in time, to the era a decade ago when Peshawar became synonymous with the wreckage of a militant campaign that profoundly changed a nation.</p> <p>In the years after 2015, when Pakistani Taliban fighters and other militants were mostly pushed out of the region — many into neighboring Afghanistan — Peshawar residents dared to hope that the days of random terrorist attacks were behind them.</p> <p>But on Tuesday, as emergency responders pulled body after body from the rubble, questions immediately intensified about the government's ability to fight a new wave of militancy amid a seemingly intractable economic and political crisis.</p> <p>The bombing was one of the bloodiest suicide attacks to hit Pakistan in years, killing at least 101 people and wounding 217 others, hospital officials said. Many of the casualties were police officers and government employees who had gone to pray at the mosque, in a heavily guarded neighborhood near several important government and military buildings.</p> <p>The attack has added to recent evidence that the Pakistani Taliban, a faction of which claimed responsibility, is regaining strength from safe havens in Afghanistan under that country's new government.</p> <p>"The scale of this attack, that it targeted policemen at a mosque in a secure part of Peshawar — this really brings about a sense of déjà vu, a vivid reminder of the insecurity and violence that engulfed Pakistan a decade ago," said Madiha Afzal, a fellow at the Brookings Institution.</p>

In Peshawar, the memory of those days is visceral — and the sense of loss from the attack is profound. As dusk fell on Tuesday, and the shaken city gathered to bury rows and rows of coffins, many were wondering: Have the days of blood and horror returned? And if they have, where will the country go from here?

For most of the past 40 years, Peshawar has suffered from the conflicts in the region. In the 1980s, it became a staging ground for fighters struggling against the Soviet-backed Afghan government, and after the United States toppled Afghanistan's Taliban regime in 2001, thousands of Taliban fighters and Al Qaeda members took refuge in so-called tribal areas along the border.

For years, Taliban leaders recruited Pakistanis who, like the Afghan Taliban, were ethnically Pashtun, while Pakistani military authorities tried to drive the militants out.

By 2007, a loose network of militants had asserted their own leadership and formed the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or T.T.P. The group quickly emerged as one of Pakistan's deadliest militant organizations, carrying out attacks across the country.

During that time, Peshawar became the center of the conflict. In one of the group's largest attacks, in December 2014, Taliban militants killed 147 students and teachers at an army-run public school — giving new impetus to a Pakistani military offensive that flushed most T.T.P. fighters into Afghanistan.

When the Afghan Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021, Pakistani officials were hopeful that after years of covertly supporting them, the new government would help rein in the T.T.P.

But so far, that bet has not paid off. The Afghan Taliban has refused to lean on the T.T.P., analysts say, instead insisting Pakistan address its grievances. The Afghan Taliban hosted negotiations in Kabul last year but the mediation proved fruitless — and relations between Afghan and Pakistani authorities have become strained.

And in the midst of those talks, the Pakistani Taliban were able to regroup, analysts say. In Swat, a picturesque northern valley that the T.T.P. once effectively controlled, residents watched last August as militants flooded back — bringing terror with them, they said.

Wealthy businessmen, elected representatives and doctors began receiving anonymous calls, made from Afghanistan and within Pakistan, demanding they either pay hefty extortion sums or move to other cities. The surge in extortion and threats of violence prompted thousands of protesters to flood the streets of Swat in October, demanding the government keep the peace.

"People are living in an atmosphere of panic and uncertainty in the valley because of the resurgence of Taliban violence," said Majid Ali, 26, a university student who attended several protests. "But the people will not allow anyone to destroy peace in the name of the Taliban in the region."

The attack in Peshawar comes at a time of immense economic and political upheaval that critics say has consumed Pakistan's leaders and drawn attention away from security threats, including the T.T.P. and the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, which has also stepped up its attacks.

Amid the finger-pointing of the political elite on Tuesday, there were also whispers the military may consider launching another counteroffensive like that in 2014. But today any such offensive would be complicated by the Pakistani authorities' tenuous relationship with the new government in Afghanistan.

"The most successful counterterrorism response would likely be one that focuses on the epicenter of the T.T.P.s' power right now — and that's in Afghanistan, where the group's leadership is based," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center. "If Pakistan were to carry out counterterrorism activities that are cross-border in nature that could send tensions with the Taliban in Afghanistan through the stratosphere — and that's the last thing Pakistan needs."

	<p>Even as Pakistan's police beefed up their presence on Tuesday, many are not planning to wait for the government to figure out its response. There is already widespread talk of migrating to comparatively safer cities, such as Islamabad and Lahore.</p> <p>"Not a single city is safe in Pakistan, but if compared to Peshawar, one can find comparatively calmer and peaceful," said Mukhtiar Masih, a Christian sanitary worker.</p> <p>Mr. Masih lost a friend in a 2013 suicide bombing that killed more than 120 people in a Peshawar church — and he is terrified of renewed violence. He spent Tuesday calling friends in Lahore, where there is a sizable Christian community, and beginning to pack his bags.</p> <p>"I have lived in Peshawar during the peak of terrorism from 2009 to 2013," he said. "I know how difficult it is to live."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 TTP deadly resurgence grips NW Pakistan</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/terrorists-north-west-pakistan-deadly-taliban-resurgence">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/terrorists-north-west-pakistan-deadly-taliban-resurgence</a>
GIST	<p>The bomber struck shortly before afternoon prayers, when the mosque in Peshawar's bustling Police Lines district would be at its busiest. Hundreds of people, including many police officers, were inside as the device detonated, creating a blast so strong the roof and wall collapsed and 92 people were killed.</p> <p>The <a href="#">attack on Monday</a> was among the worst in years to hit Peshawar, a city in north-west Pakistan that has been ravaged relentlessly by deadly terrorist violence over decades. Hours after the attack, responsibility was claimed by a low-level commander from one faction of the Pakistan Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), as revenge for the death of a fighter in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Later, an official spokesperson from the TTP distanced themselves from the incident, stating it was not their policy to target mosques. Yet it was just the latest escalation in an onslaught of violence claimed by TTP in the north-west province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which in recent months has been in the grip of a deadly Taliban resurgence that the government and Pakistan's powerful military appear powerless to control.</p> <p>Only two weeks previously, a police station on the outskirts of Peshawar was targeted in a coordinated onslaught by well-equipped <a href="#">Taliban</a> fighters. "The terrorists were armed with modern weapons and night vision glasses," said Irshad Malik, an assistant sub-inspector who was in the police station during the attack. "They targeted officers with snipers and hurled hand-grenades at the police station." Three officers were killed.</p> <p>Raza Khan, another officer present, said security agencies were "under attack across the province". "It is a scary situation," he added. "The terrorists seem to be everywhere."</p> <p>TTP, which is separate from the Taliban in <a href="#">Afghanistan</a> but shares a similar hardline Islamist ideology, has waged a bloody insurgency in Pakistan for the past 15 years, fighting for stricter enforcement of Islamic sharia law. The group has been responsible for some of the deadliest terrorist attacks on Pakistan soil, including the 2014 Peshawar school massacre in which 132 children were killed.</p> <p>After military operations in 2014 and 2017, which resulted in heavy bloodshed, they were largely suppressed. Yet since November, they have once again stepped up attacks after peace negotiations with the government failed and the group declared it was ending its ceasefire.</p> <p>Since then, the security situation has deteriorated rapidly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province neighbouring Afghanistan, as the Pakistan Taliban have carried out almost a dozen deadly attacks targeting police and military posts. In one incident in December, Taliban detainees overpowered their guards at a counter-terrorism unit, seized control of the facility and held them hostage for more than 24 hours, leaving more than a dozen army and police officers dead.</p>

Michael Kugelman, a senior associate for south Asia at the Wilson Center, said: “TTP’s intensifying attacks on Pakistani security forces are meant to send a simple but unsettling message: the state can’t stop them.”

The seemingly uncontrollable resurgence of the TTP in Pakistan had been forewarned by many observers since the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August 2020, after they seized control from the US-backed government and imposed brutal Islamic rule on the country. The triumph of the Taliban in Afghanistan was celebrated in Islamabad including by the then prime minister, Imran Khan, who said the country had broken from “the shackles of slavery”.

But promises by the Afghan Taliban not to shelter TTP fighters proved hollow and the relationship between the Pakistan government and the Taliban began to break down.

“Pakistan’s mistake was to think that the Taliban would be willing to help it curb TTP,” said Kugelman. “The Taliban’s track record has been consistent: the group doesn’t turn on its militant allies. It didn’t turn on al-Qaida, so why would it turn on TTP, with which the Taliban have been aligned ideologically for years?”

Meanwhile, misguided efforts by Khan’s government included 5,000 TTP fighters being brought back to Pakistan from Afghanistan to be rehabilitated and resettled in the tribal area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The programme failed after ceasefire negotiations broke down and funding could not be found to resettle the fighters, leaving Pakistan with more TTP fighters freely roaming on home soil.

The defence minister, Khawaja Asif, who serves under the new government of Shehbaz Sharif, confirmed that the hundreds of TTP fighters had been brought over under the previous Khan government. Asif was critical of the failed rehabilitation plan, accepting that it had instead helped fuel recent terrorist activity in the country.

He said the TTP fighters “did not settle down like normal citizens. Instead they are going back to their old activities, creating an atmosphere of fear in these areas.”

Asif described the situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as “bad without a doubt”. “They know it, we know it, everyone knows that Pakistani Taliban are using Afghan soil for terrorism in Pakistan,” he said. “We would like to avoid a military operation but if we are compelled to use force then we will have to.”

In Waziristan, a heavily militarised mountainous region bordering Afghanistan, which historically has been at the centre of Taliban attacks and brutal security operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, locals described how the Taliban presence could be felt heavily once again. They said an influx of TTP fighters had come from Afghanistan and the Taliban were now controlling the many security checkpoints at night.

“For over a year we have seen TTP militants crossing into Pakistan,” said Anwar Khyalwani, from the local organisation The Voice of People. Locals described how Pakistan Taliban militants now roamed freely around the area, including in the bazaar, and said they had been involved in ransom, kidnapping and extortion of local businesses.

Local anger at the government and military was potent. Most had lost relatives to years of terrorist attacks and retaliatory military operations, and the return of the TTP meant only more violence and bloodshed. “We have lost most men and our widowed women would guard the house at night. We had peace for a very short period, and it seems the terrorists are back. We are tired of war,” said Malik Ala Noor Khan, 40, who lost 14 family members and joined a recent march calling for peace.

Many believed the TTP had only used the ceasefire with the government to regroup and reorganise so they could come back stronger. Manzoor Pashteen, the founder of the Pashtun Tahafuz movement (PTM) that works for peace in the violence-stricken tribal areas, said all the government’s negotiations with the Pakistan Taliban had “never yielded us peace”.



	<p>“These negotiations were only to give each other space for a few months,” he said. “In a way, these negotiations were a justification, a gateway to allow militant organisation in tribal areas.”</p> <p>As hundreds of locals gathered recently in Wana, a town in Waziristan, they waved white flags of peace to protest against the violence that had once again imposed itself on their lives. “Through peaceful protests of the people, we will continue to challenge this war being fought on our soil,” said Pashteen. “This is not our war.”</p>
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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Louisiana zoo: 12 squirrel monkeys stolen</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/01/us/zoosiana-squirrel-monkeys-stolen/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/01/us/zoosiana-squirrel-monkeys-stolen/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>Twelve squirrel monkeys have been stolen from a zoo in Louisiana after their facility was broken into over the weekend.</p> <p>The theft happened shortly before midnight Saturday and authorities are investigating, Zoosiana said on its <a href="#">Facebook</a> page.</p> <p>“The individual targeted facilities of smaller primates and specifically compromised the Squirrel Monkey exhibit,” the zoo said.</p> <p>The investigation at the zoo in Broussard, Louisiana, just outside Lafayette, comes as authorities in Dallas are investigating a <a href="#">series of unusual incidents</a> involving animals at the zoo there, including the disappearance Monday of two emperor tamarin monkeys found a day later in an abandoned home about 15 miles away, officials said.</p> <p>Zoosiana didn’t say how many squirrel monkeys it had but noted the remaining monkeys were assessed by a veterinarian and animal care team and were in good health.</p> <p>“All other animals are accounted for and appear to have been undisturbed,” Zoosiana said.</p> <p>Zoo officials are working with local, state and federal agencies and asked anyone with information to come forward.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 TSA: record number guns at SEA in Jan.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tsa-finds-record-breaking-number-guns-sea-security-checkpoints/XW76VI37NJH6NKEVVADISYTNHU/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tsa-finds-record-breaking-number-guns-sea-security-checkpoints/XW76VI37NJH6NKEVVADISYTNHU/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Transportation Security Administration officers found the 13th and 14th firearms of 2023 at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Sunday, according to the agency.</p> <p>It’s a <a href="#">record for the month of January</a>, according to the agency.</p> <p>The record-breaking January comes about a week after TSA officials spoke about a record-breaking 2022 at security checkpoints statewide.</p> <p>TSA officers found <a href="#">164 guns in airports across Washington in 2022</a>. 113 of those were found at SEA. That’s 16 more than in 2021 and 95 more than in 2020.</p> <p>TSA found 6,542 guns nationwide. Officers found 5,419 firearms in 2010.</p>

	<p>Firearms must be unloaded and locked in a hard-sided container as checked baggage only, according to SEA officials. More information on firearm safety and policies <a href="#">can be found here</a>.</p> <p>Even with a concealed weapons permit, passengers can't take firearms in carry-on luggage. Weapons can be flown on commercial aircraft with specific guidelines, according to TSA's website.</p> <p>Travelers can also use the TSA "Can I Bring" feature on their website and mobile app or tweet "@AskTSA" from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. PST with questions.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Dozens of \$billion weather disasters in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2023/01/dozens-of-billion-dollar-weather-disasters-hit-earth-in-2022/">https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2023/01/dozens-of-billion-dollar-weather-disasters-hit-earth-in-2022/</a>
GIST	<p>The planet was besieged by 42 billion-dollar weather disasters in 2022, and the total damage wrought by weather disasters was \$360 billion, with 39% of that total being insured damages, said insurance broker Gallagher Re in its <a href="#">annual report</a> issued Jan. 30. A separate accounting by insurance broker Aon, <a href="#">released Jan. 25</a>, cataloged 37 billion-dollar weather disasters in 2022, with a total economic loss of \$313 billion. This was 4% above the 21<sup>st</sup>-century annual average.</p> <p>Global losses were dominated by one event: Hurricane Ian's catastrophic impact on Florida and then South Carolina, which generated economic and insured losses that were 32% and 39%, respectively, of the globe's entire annual total.</p> <p>"The fingerprints of climate change were visible on virtually every major weather and climate event in 2022, once again highlighting the urgency to implement proper planning and investment strategies that will limit the risk to life and property," noted the Gallagher Re report. However, it is difficult to quantify how much climate change contributed to these disaster losses since the dominant cause of increasing damages in recent years is thought to be because of an increase in wealth and exposure — in other words, more people with more stuff living in vulnerable areas.</p> <p><b>Second-costliest year on record for drought</b></p> <p>Global economic losses for drought in 2022 were \$77 billion, according to Gallagher Re; Aon put drought losses at \$54 billion, making it the second-costliest year on record for drought, behind only 2012 (adjusted for inflation). Drought, along with war in Ukraine and the pandemic, pushed global food prices to an all-time record high in 2022. Drought in Europe in 2022 cost \$26 billion, according to Gallagher Re, which would rank as the second-costliest European weather disaster, using numbers from EM-DAT (which has not yet released its European numbers for 2022). Europe's costliest disaster on record (\$43 billion in flood damage in Germany and Belgium) occurred in 2021.</p> <p><b>Deadliest weather disasters of 2022</b></p> <p>The deadliest disaster of 2022 using direct plus indirect deaths was the heat wave that accompanied drought in Europe during the summer. This event led to over 40,000 excess deaths, according to preliminary estimates based on Gallagher Re analysis of country-level excess mortality statistics.</p> <p>The deadliest weather disasters for direct deaths in 2022 were monsoon floods in India and Pakistan, which killed 2,047 and 1,735 people, respectively. The death toll in Pakistan was slightly less than the 1,985 deaths recorded in the catastrophic flooding of 2010.</p> <p><b>Three mega-disasters costing over \$20 billion</b></p> <p>Three individual weather events in 2022 topped the \$20 billion economic loss threshold: Hurricane Ian (\$113-\$115 billion), drought in the U.S. (\$21-\$22 billion), and drought in Europe (\$22-\$26 billion). This was just the fifth time on record in which three of more \$20+ billion events had been registered in a calendar year.</p> <p><b>Four nations had their costliest weather disasters on record in 2022</b></p>

Based on historical disaster costs at EM-DAT, Pakistan's \$15 billion 2022 flood catastrophe (9% of GDP) was that nation's most expensive weather disaster on record, ahead of the \$12.8 billion (2022 USD) damages from flooding in 2010.

In addition, three nations in Africa — Nigeria, South Africa, and Somalia — set all-time records for their most costly weather-related disaster during 2022. According to EM-DAT, the 2022 floods in Nigeria did \$4.2 billion in damage (previous costliest weather disaster: flooding in 2012 that cost \$640 million); the 2022 floods in South Africa did \$3.5 billion in damage (previous costliest disaster: \$2.2 billion 2022 USD from a 1990 drought). These are the two most expensive weather disasters on record in all of Africa (adjusted for inflation).

In Somalia, drought that began in 2021 and continued into late 2022 cost \$1.1 billion, making it that nation's costliest weather disaster on record. Neighboring Ethiopia suffered \$640 million in drought losses, which was that nation's second-costliest weather disaster on record, behind the \$1.7 billion cost of the 2015-2017 drought. Drought costs were also significant in Kenya in 2022 (\$280 million), ranking as that nation's second-costliest weather disaster on record. Disaster costs in Europe from EM-DAT for 2022 were not available at the time of this writing, but using the 2022 damage stats from Gallagher Re, the droughts in France and Spain were the second-costliest weather disasters on record in those nations, when compared to previous disasters logged in EM-DAT.

For comparison, two nations had their most expensive weather-related natural disaster in history in the EM-DAT database in 2021, one in 2020, seven in 2019, two in 2018, three in 2017, four in 2016, and nine in 2015. Note that these tallies will be considerably different using Aon or Gallagher Re disaster figures, which often differ from EM-DAT's by a factor of two. Aon's database is generally superior to EM-DAT's but is not publicly available in full detail.

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## Billion-Dollar Weather Disasters, 2022 (NOAA and Aon)

Rank	Disaster	Location	Dates	Damage	Deaths
1	Hurricane Ian	U.S. (FL, SC, NC), Cuba	Sep. 27-Oct. 1	\$113 billion	152
2	Drought	U.S.	Yearlong	\$22.2 billion	136
3	Drought	Europe (W, S, Central)	Yearlong	\$22 billion	N/A
4	Flooding	Pakistan	Monsoon season	\$15 billion	1,739
4	Flooding	China	Jun. 1-Sep. 30	\$15 billion	195
6	Flooding	Eastern Australia	Feb. 23- Mar. 31	\$8.0 billion	22
7	Drought	China	Yearlong	\$7.6 billion	N/A
8	Windstorm Eunice	Europe, Western & Central	Feb. 18-19	\$4.5 billion	17
9	Flooding	India	Monsoon season	\$4.2 billion	2,135
10	Drought	Brazil	Yearlong	\$4.0 billion	N/A
10	Hurricane Fiona	Caribbean, Canada	Sep. 18-25	\$4.0 billion	25
12	Flooding	South Africa	Apr. 8-15	\$3.6 billion	455
13	Severe Weather	U.S. Midwest	Jun. 13	\$3.2 billion	1
14	Wildfires	U.S. West	Apr.-Nov.	\$3.1 billion	17
15	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, Midwest	May 11-12	\$2.8 billion	1
15	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, Midwest	Apr. 11-13	\$2.8 billion	1
17	Winter Weather	U.S.	Dec. 21-26	\$2.7 billion	98
18	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, South, Midwest	May 19	\$2.5 billion	0
19	Severe Weather	Europe, Western & Central	Jun. 19-24	\$2.4 billion	5
20	Flooding	Nigeria	Jun.-Oct.	\$2.3 billion	660
21	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, Midwest	May 9	\$2.2 billion	0
22	Typhoon Nanmadol	Japan	Sep. 18-21	\$2.0 billion	5
22	Drought	Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya	Yearlong	\$2.0 billion	N/A
24	Severe Weather	U.S. Midwest	Jun. 7-8	\$1.9 billion	0
25	Severe Weather	Europe, Western & Central	Jun. 2-6	\$1.7 billion	2
26	Drought	Mexico	Yearlong	\$1.5 billion	N/A
26	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, South	Apr. 4-6	\$1.5 billion	3
26	Flooding	U.S. (MO, KY)	Jul. 25-28	\$1.5 billion	42
29	Flooding	Australia	Oct. 12-28	\$1.3 billion	2
29	Typhoon Hinnamnor	Japan, Korea, Philippines	Sep. 1-6	\$1.3 billion	14
29	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, South	Mar. 30	\$1.3 billion	2
29	Severe Weather	Europe, Western & Central	Jun. 26-29	\$1.3 billion	2
29	Severe Weather	U.S. Mid-Atlantic, Midwest	Jul. 22-24	\$1.3 billion	1
34	Severe Weather	Canada	May 21	\$1.2 billion	12
34	Severe Weather	U.S. Plains, Midwest	May 1-3	\$1.2 billion	1
36	Severe Weather	U.S. (TX)	Feb. 21-22	\$1.1 billion	0
37	Hurricane Nicole	U.S. (FL)	Nov. 10-11	\$1.0 billion	5

Background Image: Flooding in New South Wales, Australia, February 2022 (NSW Police Force). Loss data: NOAA for U.S., Aon for non-U.S.

HEADLINE	<b>02/01 Australia missing radioactive capsule found</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/radioactive-capsule-fell-off-truck-found-australia-96810499">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/radioactive-capsule-fell-off-truck-found-australia-96810499</a>
GIST	<p>PERTH, Australia -- Authorities in Western Australia on Wednesday recovered a tiny but dangerous radioactive capsule that fell off a truck while being transported along a 1,400-kilometer (870-mile) highway last month in what an official said was like finding the needle in the haystack.</p> <p>Officials said the capsule the size of a pea was found south of Newman on the Great Northern Highway. It was detected by a search vehicle travelling at 70 kilometers (43 miles) per hour when specialist equipment picked up radiation emitting from the capsule.</p> <p>Portable search equipment was then used to locate it 2 meters (6.5 feet) from the side of the road.</p> <p>“This is an extraordinary result ... they have quite literally found the needle in the haystack,” said Emergency Services Minister Stephen Dawson.</p> <p>Chief Health Officer Andy Robertson said the capsule did not appear to have moved and no injuries had been reported.</p> <p>It contains the caesium 137 ceramic source, commonly used in radiation gauges, which emits dangerous amounts of radiation, equivalent of receiving 10 X-rays in an hour. It could cause skin burns and prolonged exposure could cause cancer.</p> <p>Search crews had spent six days scouring the entire length of the highway.</p> <p>The capsule measures 8 millimeters by 6 millimeters (0.31 inches by 0.24 inches), and people have been warned it could have unknowingly become lodged in their car’s tires.</p> <p>A government investigation has been launched into how the capsule fell off the truck and a report will be provided to the health minister.</p> <p>Defence officials were verifying the identification of the capsule, which has been placed into a lead container for safety. It will be stored in a secure location in Newman before being transported to a health facility in the city of Perth.</p> <p>The capsule got lost while being transported between a desert mine site and Perth on Jan. 10. The truck transporting the capsule arrived at a Perth depot on Jan. 16. Emergency services were notified of the missing capsule on Jan. 25.</p> <p>The chief executive of the mining giant Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Simon Trott, has apologized for the incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Dallas Zoo missing monkeys found</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/pair-monkeys-missing-dallas-zoo-police-investigating/story?id=96775957">https://abcnews.go.com/US/pair-monkeys-missing-dallas-zoo-police-investigating/story?id=96775957</a>
GIST	<p>Two monkeys that were reported missing from the Dallas Zoo on Monday have been found, zoo officials announced. The Dallas Police Department found the emperor tamarin monkeys on Tuesday and alerted zoo officials.</p> <p>The zoo’s veterinarians will evaluate the monkeys, according to the zoo.</p> <p>Dallas Police received a tip that the monkeys were at an abandoned home in Lancaster, a city in the Dallas area, and responding officers found the animals in a closet in the home shortly before 5 p.m. local time, police said.</p>



Before the animals were found, Dallas PD released a photo on Tuesday of an unidentified man they are currently looking to speak with about the missing tamarin monkeys.

No arrests have been made and the investigation is ongoing, police said.

The missing monkeys was the latest in a series of animal incidents to rock the Dallas Zoo this month, resulting in police seeking the public's help.

Members of the zoo's animal care team discovered two emperor tamarin monkeys missing from their habitats, which was "intentionally compromised," the Dallas Zoo told ABC News in a statement.

Zoo officials alerted law enforcement officials about the missing monkeys, which have yet to be found.

Dallas police issued an image of a person on Tuesday, saying, "Detectives are looking to speak with the man in regard to the two tamarin monkeys missing from the Dallas Zoo."

"Emperor tamarin monkeys would likely stay close to home -- the zoo searched near their habitat and across zoo grounds, and did not locate them," the Dallas Zoo tweeted Monday. "Based on the Dallas Police Department's initial assessment, they have reason to believe the tamarins were taken."

The Dallas Police Department is investigating the incident and said it believes "the animals were intentionally taken from the enclosure."

"Officers responded and the preliminary investigation determined an intentional cut was made into a tamarin monkey enclosure at the zoo," the department said in a Monday statement.

This is the second time animals have gone missing from the zoo in recent weeks.

Earlier this month, a clouded leopard escaped her enclosure after her fence was "intentionally cut," officials said at the time. According to zoo officials, the female leopard, named Nova, was found the same day it went missing. Dallas police launched a criminal investigation into the incident.

In a similar incident this month, the Dallas Police Department opened a criminal investigation after finding a second fence cut inside the langur monkey habitat at the Dallas Zoo.

Despite the cut fence, no langurs escaped their habitat or appeared to be in danger or harmed, Dallas PD said in a press release.

On Jan. 21, zoo workers found a rare and endangered vulture dead in its enclosure, describing its death as "unusual." Both police and zoo officials said the vulture, named Pin, did not appear to die from natural causes.

The Dallas Zoo confirmed that it had increased its security measures after the vulture's death and the leopard's escape.

"In the past week, we have added additional cameras throughout the zoo and increased onsite security patrols during the overnight hours," the statement from the zoo read. "We will continue to implement and expand our safety and security measures to whatever level necessary to keep our animals and staff safe."

It's unclear if the incidents with the clouded leopard, dead vulture and missing monkeys are related.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Fear: Georgetown encampment violence
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-crime-violence-homeless-encampments-georgetown-5th-avenue-south-michigan-street-safety-concerns-nearby-residents-businesses-king-county">https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-crime-violence-homeless-encampments-georgetown-5th-avenue-south-michigan-street-safety-concerns-nearby-residents-businesses-king-county</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — People who live and work near a growing homeless encampment in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood say they want action immediately to address safety concerns in the area.</p> <p>The encampment, located at the intersection of 5th Avenue and South Michigan Street, was the <a href="#">scene of a deadly shooting on Jan. 19</a>. Seattle police said two men were shot and killed while sitting in a car earlier. A man was also <a href="#">arrested for allegedly assaulting a woman and then charging a police officer</a> with a knife on Jan. 25.</p> <p>"We are very scared," said Marik Khabra, who owns a gas station nearby. "Sometimes the homeless guys come and fight our employees. Customers are scared too. They see it and say, 'Oh, I don't want to go to that area.'"</p> <p>At the end of the week, the Seattle Credit Union located at the intersection adjacent to the encampment will close. The <a href="#">company said the closure is due</a>, in part, to safety and security issues.</p> <p>After the Jan. 19 shooting, a <a href="#">spokesperson for the city said gun violence</a> is a factor that is considered by the city's Unified Care Team in prioritizing which camps to address.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the Seattle City Council said it wanted more data from the city's Unified Care Team and the King County Regional Homelessness Authority on how camps are prioritized for outreach, as well as data on why people in those camps do not accept offers of housing.</p> <p>"I would like to see this data that we are collecting on refusals inform some of our planning efforts to drive that number down considerably. I think that's the biggest number if we are or aren't making progress - not necessarily the people we have figured out how to provide support for, but it's the people we have not figured out how to provide support for... those are the feedback loops I'm most interested in having before the committee," <a href="#">Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis said</a>.</p> <p>The <a href="#">city's homelessness dashboard</a> says there were 116 reports of shootings or shots fired involving encampments in 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 Antifa links to Jane's Revenge attacks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/31/antifa-link-casts-janes-revenge-attacks-pro-life-c/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/31/antifa-link-casts-janes-revenge-attacks-pro-life-c/</a>
GIST	<p>Dozens of pro-life pregnancy centers have been terrorized for months by a radical pro-choice outfit calling itself Jane's Revenge, but now it looks as if the previously unknown group is entwined with a more significant threat: Antifa.</p> <p>Antifa trackers and conservative media outlets linked two Miami residents charged with conspiracy in attacks on crisis pregnancy centers in Florida to the shadowy anarchist movement after the Justice Department unsealed the federal indictment last week.</p> <p>One of the suspects, 23-year-old Amber Smith-Stewart, has made no secret of her Antifa sympathies. She has identified herself as "Antifa, anti-capitalist" on her Facebook page, which includes images of pro-Antifa posters and flags from a screenshot posted on the AntifaWatch website.</p> <p>The second suspect, 27-year-old Caleb Freestone, is listed on AntifaWatch and has been active with Whatever It Takes, a left-wing pro-choice group with no love for "fascists" that advocates for "sustained civil resistance" and "direct action."</p>



He was arrested in July at a heated Miami-Dade County school board meeting and charged with disorderly conduct, resisting arrest without violence and trespassing after a warning. A woman at the meeting publicly accused him of being with Antifa, which he appeared to deny.

“People who are accused of being the boogeyman Antifa are met with a significant police response,” Mr. Freestone told WLRN public radio.

The two are accused in June attacks on a trio of pregnancy resource centers in Hialeah, Hollywood and Winter Haven. Vandals left behind spray-painted messages such as “Jane,” “Jane was here” and “Jane’s Revenge,” as well as the anarchist “A” symbol favored by Antifa.

That doesn’t mean Antifa and Jane’s Revenge are the same, but they likely share much of the same personnel, said Kyle Shideler, senior analyst for homeland security and counterterrorism for the Center for Security Policy.

He described both as examples of anarchist and autonomist Marxist groups organized by affinity groups, small cells of people who share the same politics and engage in direct action together. They often join other affinity groups to form clusters. Those that stay together are called collectives or blocs.

“There are probably people who identify as Jane’s Revenge who do not engage in activities that Antifa is best known for, but the overlap is really high,” Mr. Shideler said.

A week after the Supreme Court’s draft opinion overturning Roe v. Wade was leaked on May 2, a group calling itself Jane’s Revenge firebombed the Wisconsin Family Action headquarters in Madison and issued a communique warning that more attacks were coming.

That assault acted as a call to arms for affinity groups nationwide, Mr. Shideler said.

“You had the initial incident that was carried out by Jane’s Revenge, and then they issued a manifesto essentially saying if you believe in this, then you are a member of us. Go out and do what we have done,” Mr. Shideler said. “It’s a very common insurrectionary, anarchist way of thinking. So various affinity groups across the country took up that call and conducted actions in the name of Jane’s Revenge.”

Since the Supreme Court leak, at least 79 pro-life facilities and 126 Catholic churches have been attacked, according to the CatholicVote tracker.

The Jane’s Revenge statement issued in May through Bellingcat journalist Robert Evans ended with: “We are not one group, but many. We are in your city. We are in every city.”

Jane’s Revenge might not be organized in every city, but affinity groups nationwide appear to engage in direct action campaigns such as protests, vandalism and attacks on property for a variety of far-left causes.

Portland, Oregon, journalist Andy Ngo, author of the 2021 book “Unmasked: Inside Antifa’s Radical Plan to Destroy Democracy,” made the Antifa connection last year. He called Jane’s Revenge a “terrorist far-left group connected to #Antifa.”

Mr. Shideler compared the structure to that of the Islamic State group, in which “somebody who commits an attack in the name of the Islamic State was considered to be a member of the Islamic State, even if they hadn’t discussed the matter beforehand.”

“Conducting the action is your membership. It’s what makes you part of the group,” he said. “If you commit an action in the name of the group, you’re a member of the group as far as they’re concerned. And that makes them very challenging to deal with.”

The result is a network of underground activist organizations with many of the same members but different thrusts.

“What we see is that a lot of these anarchist and autonomist affinity groups conduct actions for a variety of what we would call policy reasons,” Mr. Shideler said. “It might be environmental stuff, it might be pro-abortion stuff, it might be what they call anti-fascist organizing.”

A self-described “autonomous group” called Defend the Atlanta Forests is leading protests against the construction of a police training center in DeKalb County, Georgia, which critics call “cop city.” One man was fatally shot on Jan. 18 after shooting and wounding a Georgia state trooper, authorities said.

More than 20 protesters have been charged since December with domestic terrorism. Six of them were arrested after the Jan. 21 rioting in Atlanta. Some media outlets have identified the demonstrators as Antifa and others as “forest defenders.”

“The media has a tendency to do exactly what these networks expect that they will do, which is to focus on the name of the group: ‘Oh, this is a new group. Where do they come from? Oh, it’s very mysterious,’” said Mr. Shideler. “Well, it’s actually probably a lot of the usual suspects, but using a new name to focus on the issue they want you to focus on.”

CompassCare CEO James Harden, whose pregnancy resource center in New York was firebombed by Jane’s Revenge in June, said he wasn’t surprised by the Antifa link because of the ideological similarities.

“Jane’s Revenge is an anarchist group, and Antifa does have links to anarchist activity,” said Mr. Harden. “There’s definitely crossover. To the extent that they see a connection between pro-life activity and the traditional Judeo-Christian norms that they’re looking to undermine, that’s where they’re going to focus their efforts.”

He cited a July 1 protest outside the Illinois home of Thomas More Society chief counsel Thomas Brejcha that bore the hallmarks of Antifa.

“Our lead attorney was doxxed, and they had a massive protest at his house,” Mr. Harden said. “They had the signature graffiti, the typical garb that they wear, the face masks, the anarchist stuff. It’s all very, very similar.”

The two Miami residents were also charged with violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, the first time the federal law has been used against pro-choice versus pro-life protesters, Mr. Harden said.

The Justice Department said the suspects “violated the FACE Act by intentionally damaging and destroying the facility’s property because the facility provides reproductive health services.”

The LifeChoice Pregnancy Center in Winter Haven provides no-cost services, including pregnancy tests and ultrasounds.

The defendants face a maximum of 12 years in prison, three years of supervised release and fines of up to \$350,000.

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HEADLINE	01/31 US charges 4 in killing of Haiti president
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/politics/charges-haiti-moise-assassination.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/us/politics/charges-haiti-moise-assassination.html</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON — Three Haitian Americans and a Colombian national have been charged in the United States with involvement in the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse of Haiti, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

The [announcement of the charges](#) from the federal government — more than 18 months after the [murder of Mr. Moïse](#) — outlined a sprawling conspiracy to murder the Haitian leader and seize power, supported by an unnamed former Haitian Supreme Court judge, Colombian mercenaries and an illegal arms shipment from the United States.

The decision to charge the four men, who are considered to be some of the ringleaders in the assassination plot, in the United States is an indication of the chronic dysfunction of the Haitian justice system. [Government institutions have disintegrated](#) after Mr. Moïse's assassination, and conditions in the country have worsened in recent months.

Three of the four men were charged with conspiracy in the murder of Mr. Moïse: [James Solages and Joseph Vincent](#), who are dual Haitian American citizens, and [Germán Alejandro Rivera García](#), a Colombian accused of leading a group of mercenaries operating in Haiti.

[Dr. Christian Emmanuel Sanon](#), another dual Haitian American citizen, was charged with counts related to smuggling.

Three other men had already been charged in the United States in connection with the assassination plot. Whether other powerful business and political figures in Haiti — including some senior officials in the current government — conspired in the plot remains a central question in the case.

The four newly charged men are scheduled to make their first appearance in court in Miami on Wednesday afternoon, after being transferred into U.S. custody on Tuesday. They were arrested in Haiti soon after Mr. Moïse's assassination and had been detained there since.

Haitian authorities had said at the time of Dr. Sanon's arrest that they believed he wanted to [seize power for himself as president](#). But he was not charged with conspiracy to commit murder, as the three other men had been.

Mr. Solages and Dr. Sanon had met in April 2021, the Justice Department said, “to discuss regime change in Haiti and support for Sanon, an aspiring Haitian political candidate.”

After that meeting, the department added, the two men received a list of equipment needed for the “regime change operation,” including rifles, machine guns, tear gas, grenades, ammunition and bulletproof vests.

The Justice Department said Dr. Sanon then conspired with others in June 2021 to ship body armor from South Florida to Haiti to be used by a group of 20 Colombian mercenaries, led by Mr. García, “who were recruited to assist in the operation and provide security to Sanon.”

Later in June 2021, the complaints allege, “support for President Moïse's replacement shifted to a former Haitian Supreme Court judge” who provided cover for a plot to arrest and imprison Mr. Moïse, signing a document that “claimed to provide immunity in Haiti to those who participated in the operation.”

By July 6, 2021, the day before assassination, the plan had changed, according to the Justice Department: Mr. Solages announced to Mr. Vincent, Mr. García and other conspirators that they would kill Mr. Moïse.

Mr. Solages, Mr. Vincent and Mr. García face up to life imprisonment if convicted. Dr. Sanon faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

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HEADLINE	01/31 NM criminal charges filed in 'Rust' shooting
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/alec-baldwin-involuntary-manslaughter-rust-movie-shooting-jan-31-2023">https://www.q13fox.com/news/alec-baldwin-involuntary-manslaughter-rust-movie-shooting-jan-31-2023</a>
GIST	SANTA FE, N.M. - Actor Alec Baldwin and a weapons specialist have been formally charged with involuntary manslaughter in the fatal shooting of a cinematographer on a New Mexico movie set, according to court documents filed by prosecutors Tuesday.

Santa Fe District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies filed the charging documents naming Baldwin and Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, who supervised weapons on the set of the Western "Rust," and outlined evidence that they deviated repeatedly from known safety standards.

Halyna Hutchins died shortly after being wounded during rehearsals at a ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe on Oct. 21, 2021. Baldwin was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when the gun went off, killing her and wounding the director, Joel Souza.

Prosecutors have said that Baldwin's involvement as a producer and as the person who fired the gun weighed in the decision to file charges.

In recent weeks, Carmack-Altwies outlined two sets of involuntary manslaughter charges in connection with the shooting.

The manslaughter charge filed Tuesday against Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed includes two alternative standards and sanctions.

One version would require proof of negligence, which is punishable by up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine under New Mexico law.

The second alternative is for reckless disregard of safety "without due caution and circumspection." It carries a higher threshold of wrongdoing and includes a "firearm enhancement" that could result in a mandatory five years in prison because the offense was committed with a gun.

Prosecutors have said a jury may ultimately decide which definition of manslaughter to pursue.

A probable cause statement outlining evidence against Baldwin alleges many instances of "extremely reckless acts" or reckless failures to take precautions in the days and minutes leading up to the deadly shooting.

Criminal defense attorney explains charges against Alec Baldwin in 'Rust' movie set shooting  
Actor Alec Baldwin and a weapons specialist will be charged with involuntary manslaughter in the fatal shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins who was killed on a New Mexico movie set, prosecutors announced Thursday, citing a "criminal disregard for safety." Assistant director David Halls, who handed Baldwin the gun, has signed an agreement to plead guilty to negligent use of a deadly weapon, the district attorney's office said.

Investigators say that Baldwin drew a revolver from a holster, pointed it at Hutchins and fired the weapon when a plastic or replica gun should have been used by industry standards.

It says photos and videos of the rehearsal, including moments before the deadly shooting, showed Baldwin with his finger inside the trigger guard and on the trigger while "manipulating" the pistol's hammer, and that an FBI analysis shows the pistol could not be fired without pressing the trigger.

Investigators say Baldwin failed to appear for mandatory firearms training prior to filming, and that he didn't fully complete on-set training while distracted by phone calls to family. They also cite several breaches of required safety-checks and protocols as the gun was loaded and provided to Baldwin.

Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed maintain their innocence and have vowed to fight the charges.

Baldwin's attorney Luke Nikas declined comment Tuesday and referred to his previous statement on the case, in which he called the charges a "terrible miscarriage of justice" that he and his client would fight and win.

"Mr. Baldwin had no reason to believe there was a live bullet in the gun – or anywhere on the movie set," the statement said. "He relied on the professionals with whom he worked."

Gutierrez-Reed's attorney said they would release a statement later.

Prosecutors say that Baldwin, in his role as a producer of "Rust," failed to account for Gutierrez-Reed's relative inexperience as an uncertified armorer on her second film assignment. They allege that Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed skipped a critical safety check of the gun and its ammunition, and that Baldwin should have known better as an actor with extensive experience in films involving firearms.

"Standard protocol is the armorer is to show the actor the firearm, pull the bullets out in front of the actor, and demonstrate there are no live rounds (but dummies) in the firearm," investigators said. "Hannah Gutierrez-Reed did not do this protocol in front of Baldwin. Baldwin did not object."

Prosecutors also provided a new accounting of live ammunition on the set — noting that five additional live rounds were discovered by authorities, including a round in Baldwin's holster as well as an ammunition box, a holster, a weapons cart and one live round seized from Gutierrez-Reed.

Hutchins' death already has led to new safety precautions in the film industry.

Carmack-Altwies told The Associated Press in a Jan. 19 interview that the set was "really being run pretty fast and loose" and that Baldwin should have known there had been previous misfires on the set and that multiple people had brought up safety concerns.

Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed will be issued a summons to appear in court. Prosecutors will forgo a grand jury and rely on a judge to determine if there is sufficient evidence to move toward trial. It could take up to 60 days for decision.

Involuntary manslaughter can involve a killing that happens while a defendant is doing something lawful but dangerous and is acting negligently or without caution.

Prosecutors say that a proposed plea agreement signed by assistant director David Halls, who oversaw safety on set, has not yet been approved by a judge and cannot be published.

Prosecutors said previously that Halls has agreed to plead guilty in the negligent use of a deadly weapon. Prosecutors say Halls may have handled the gun improperly before it was given to Baldwin.

Heather Brewer, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, said in a statement Monday that prosecutors are "fully focused on securing justice for Halyna Hutchins" and "the evidence and the facts speak for themselves."

Video released by the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office shows Alec Baldwin rehearsing with a gun while on the set of "Rust" on Oct. 21, 2021, prior to the fatal shooting of a cinematographer.

Baldwin, also a co-producer on "Rust," has described the killing as a tragic accident. The 64-year-old actor said he was told the gun was safe and has sought to clear his name by suing people involved in handling and supplying the loaded .45-caliber revolver.

In his lawsuit, Baldwin said that while working on camera angles with Hutchins, he pointed the gun in her direction and pulled back and released the hammer of the weapon, which discharged.

Defense attorney Jason Bowles, who represents Gutierrez-Reed, said the charges are the result of a "flawed investigation" and an "inaccurate understanding of the full facts."

Defendants can participate remotely in many initial court proceedings or seek to have their first appearance waived.

	The decision to charge Baldwin marks a stunning turn of events for an A-list actor whose 40-year career included the early blockbuster "The Hunt for Red October" and a starring role in the sitcom "30 Rock," as well as iconic appearances in Martin Scorsese's "The Departed" and a film adaptation of David Mamet's "Glengary Glen Ross." In recent years, Baldwin was known for his impression of former President Donald Trump on "Saturday Night Live."
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 TPD: gun stolen from car every 48hrs</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/one-gun-is-stolen-every-48-hours-car-tacoma/N4JJ6C7WFAQXKMJ3H5C4O2GSE/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/one-gun-is-stolen-every-48-hours-car-tacoma/N4JJ6C7WFAQXKMJ3H5C4O2GSE/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Tacoma — One gun is stolen every 48 hours from a car in Tacoma, the Tacoma Police Department said Tuesday.</p> <p>Tacoma Police are asking gun owners to be more responsible with storing their guns.</p> <p>Over 200 guns were stolen from cars in 2022 in Tacoma, along with 10 less than a month into this year.</p> <p>The stolen guns being counted are from thieves breaking into cars and don't include guns that are taken out of stolen cars.</p> <p>Gun owners can prevent these thefts by not leaving guns in their cars, keeping their firearms secure, following safe handling procedures, and keeping guns out of the hands of juveniles.</p> <p>"Stolen guns are finding their way into the hands of juveniles and are being used in violent crimes," said Tacoma Chief of Police Avery L. Moore. "Many of these firearms are stolen in vehicle prowls. By not leaving firearms unattended in your vehicle, you are helping us keep guns out of the hands of juveniles."</p> <p>If your gun is actively being stolen from your car call 911, otherwise call 253-287-4455. Gun thefts cannot be filed online.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 Tacoma PD: 10 guns stolen Jan car prowls</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/tacoma-police-gun-stolen-vehicles/281-878d83dd-0f60-4619-8388-8730446852fe">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/tacoma-police-gun-stolen-vehicles/281-878d83dd-0f60-4619-8388-8730446852fe</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Between Jan. 1 and Jan. 22, 10 guns were reported stolen out of vehicles in Tacoma, according to police. Now the police department is asking gun owners to make sure their firearms are secure.</p> <p>"Stolen guns are finding their way into the hands of juveniles and are being used in violent crimes," Tacoma Chief of Police Avery L. Moore said in a statement. "Many of these firearms are stolen in vehicle prowls. By not leaving firearms unattended in your vehicle, you are helping us keep guns out of the hands of juveniles."</p> <p>The reports of 10 stolen guns are only thefts of firearms from vehicle prowls. They do not include firearms stolen during vehicle thefts.</p> <p>Police are urging the public to never leave guns in vehicles, even if they are locked.</p> <p>"I don't want to victim-shame, saying, 'Don't lock it up because someone's gonna break into your car.' That sounds terrible to say that, but there are 202 reasons for me to do that.... in the hands of who knows who-- it's really alarming for all of us," said Wendy Haddow, public information officer for Tacoma Police Department.</p>



	<p>In 2022, 202 guns were stolen out of vehicles in Tacoma, according to the police department. Last year was the deadliest in Tacoma's history. According to the police department, 45 of Pierce County's 79 homicides occurred in Tacoma last year, and 43 of them were shootings.</p> <p>Police previously said there's also been an uptick in juveniles committing violent crimes. Last August, the city released an assessment on youth violence, stating that Tacomans under age 30 die from assault at a similar rate to car crashes. The assessment described youth violence as a public health issue, and the city should take a more family-based approach to addressing it.</p> <p>"We get asked all the time, 'How are juveniles getting their hands on firearms', right? And unfortunately some of those some of those guns might be coming from these vehicle prowls," Haddow said.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Tacoma saw three shootings involving teenagers, with one leading to the death of 14-year-old Xavier Siess.</p> <p>There's a state law that says if a gun is not secured properly and it is used in a crime, the owner could also face criminal charges for community endangerment due to unsafe storage. The only way they wouldn't is if they report it stolen within five days.</p> <p>Reporting a gun theft must be done in person or over the phone. It can't be done online.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 Drug trafficking ringleader sentenced 15yrs</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/leader-drug-trafficking-ring-sentenced/281-f5b6ce8d-be0f-470b-a8d7-51308bd355c0">https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/leader-drug-trafficking-ring-sentenced/281-f5b6ce8d-be0f-470b-a8d7-51308bd355c0</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SEATTLE — The leader of a drug trafficking ring who had more than 30 kilos of meth, heroin and fentanyl pills on his Arlington property was sentenced to 15 years in prison on Tuesday, Jan. 31.</p> <p>Cesar Valdez-Sanudo, 36, pleaded guilty in June 2022 to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, conspiracy to commit money laundering and carrying a firearm in connection with a drug trafficking crime.</p> <p>During the sentencing hearing, U.S. District Judge John Coughenour said the 15-year sentence was based on the “stunning size of the drug trafficking organization, and the amount of fentanyl and the death it is causing in our community.”</p> <p>“Mr. Valdez-Sanudo led a violent ring of drug traffickers and buried kilos of meth, heroin, and fentanyl on his Arlington property, along with more than \$300,000 cash – proceeds from the harm he spread across the community,” said U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. “This is a long prison sentence, but given the harm these drugs are doing in our community, it is the appropriate sanction.”</p> <p>After a wire-tap investigation, members of the drug ring were indicted in December 2020. During the investigation, law enforcement seized around 143 pounds of meth, 15 pounds of heroin, more than 30,000 suspected fentanyl pills, 24 firearms and around \$778,000.</p> <p>Investigators found more than 27 kilos of meth, nearly six kilos of heroin and nearly two kilos of fentanyl pills on Valdez-Sanudo's Arlington property. They also found 10 firearms.</p> <p>According to prosecutors, Valdez-Sanudo laundered more than \$1 million through casinos, as well as property and vehicle purchases.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/31 WA: 150 nursing applicants fraud scheme</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/washington-applicants-florida-fake-nursing-diploma/281-b75bc5df-e9a1-4146-bd46-1a45712b4cdd">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/washington-applicants-florida-fake-nursing-diploma/281-b75bc5df-e9a1-4146-bd46-1a45712b4cdd</a>

GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — On Monday, the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission announced it had identified 150 nursing applicants using credentials from federally investigated Florida-based schools.</p> <p>"The nursing commission is there to protect the public so we took this very seriously," said Paula Meyer, the commission's executive director.</p> <p>Meyer's more than 40-year nursing career did not prepare her for what the Department of Justice called a fraudulent nursing diploma scheme.</p> <p>"We found that this was a very sophisticated scheme for fraudulent transcripts," she said.</p> <p>The DOJ alleges the three, now-closed colleges in Florida were selling fake nursing diplomas. It allowed people who were underqualified to sit for their boards, apply for licenses, and in some cases, get jobs. About 7,600 fake diplomas were sold according to the DOJ, bringing in around \$114 million between 2016 and 2021.</p> <p>Of the 150 people identified in Washington having ties to the schools, seven licenses have been rescinded, 32 are in a legal limbo waiting on a decision, four applicants were denied and 30 applicants are also in legal limbo with no final decision. Another 77 remain under investigation</p> <p>"Nursing is the number one most trusted profession in the US and has been for many years, according to Gallup Polls polls," Meyer said. "People trust nurses blindly and they expect they know what they're doing at the bedside."</p> <p>When asked if the nursing shortage, exacerbated by the pandemic, had a hand in how this scheme flew under the radar, she said, "We did our best - all the state boards - to review those licenses, review the applications to make sure they met the requirements," she said. "We also had some of the emergency waivers so nurses could come into our state to take care of the most vulnerable people. But, again, we're there to make sure to do as much as we can to protect the public.</p> <p>Meyer wants the public to know they're working diligently to make sure every nurse working in Washington is legitimate, properly educated and trained.</p> <p>The 25 people charged in the fake diploma scheme could face up to 20 years in prison.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/31 Oregon kidnapping suspect dead
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/benjamin-obadiah-foster-oregon-torture-suspect-seen-grants-pass/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/benjamin-obadiah-foster-oregon-torture-suspect-seen-grants-pass/</a>
GIST	<p>The man accused of torturing a woman he held captive in southern Oregon last week is dead after an hours-long standoff, <a href="#">CBS Medford, Oregon affiliate KTVL-TV reported late Tuesday night</a>.</p> <p>The station quoted Grants Pass police spokesperson Jeff Hattersley as saying Benjamin Obadiah Foster died at the hospital from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.</p> <p>Grants Pass police had issued an update a bit earlier saying, "After a several hour long standoff, Benjamin Foster is in custody. A press conference will be held tomorrow with additional information."</p> <p>They also said the woman he allegedly held captive remained in critical condition.</p> <p>On Tuesday, police surrounded the home where they believed Foster, 36, was holed up, a law enforcement source told CBS Radio.</p> <p>Foster was <a href="#">sought by police for attempted murder, kidnapping and assault</a> after, they said, the woman was found unconscious, bound and near death in Grants Pass last Tuesday.</p>

Police had Foster pinned down Tuesday night under the porch of the home where the woman was found, the source told CBS Radio. Police were firing bullets and tear gas into the house and asking him to come out using a bullhorn, CBS Radio reported. Foster was believed to be armed, a law enforcement source told CBS Radio.

A large police presence was seen gathered outside the home Tuesday night. Video from KTVL showed police surrounding the area and occasionally moving toward the house.

Earlier Tuesday, Grants Pass police shared a photo of what they said was Foster walking a dog "in the Grants Pass area."

On Thursday night, local and federal law enforcement agents raided a property in the unincorporated community of Wolf Creek, about 20 miles north of Grants Pass, and seized Foster's car. They arrested 68-year-old Tina Marie Jones for hindering prosecution in the raid, but Foster managed to escape.

Jones is accused of following Foster in a vehicle on Thursday as he drove to a remote location and then intentionally guiding his vehicle over an embankment, according to court documents. Jones then gave Foster a ride to the property that was raided, where he had been hiding out, court records showed.

Police had said Foster was "actively using online dating applications to contact unsuspecting individuals who may be lured into assisting with the suspect's escape or potentially as additional victims." They also warned that Foster could attempt to change his appearance by cutting or changing the color of his hair or shaving his facial hair.

In 2019, before moving to Oregon, Foster held his then-girlfriend captive inside her Las Vegas apartment for two weeks. He initially was charged with five felonies, including assault and battery, and faced decades in prison upon conviction. But in August 2021, Foster reached a deal with Clark County prosecutors that allowed him to plead guilty to one felony count of battery and a misdemeanor count of battery constituting domestic violence.

A judge sentenced him to up to 2 1/2 years in a Nevada prison. But after the 729 days he had spent in jail awaiting trial were factored into his punishment, Foster was left to serve fewer than 200 additional days in state custody.

Foster's girlfriend suffered seven broken ribs, two black eyes and injuries from being bound at the wrists and ankles with zip ties and duct tape during her two-week captivity, according to a Las Vegas police report.

The woman also told police she was forced to eat lye and was choked to the point of unconsciousness.

She escaped when Foster let her out of his sight during a trip together to a grocery store and gas station.

Court records show Foster was out of custody at the time on a suspended jail sentence for carrying a concealed weapon without a permit. He also was awaiting trial in another 2018 case involving domestic violence, but Foster's plea deal with prosecutors in 2021 settled the domestic violence case, a copy of the agreement shows, and he was "sentenced to credit for time served."

Grants Pass is a town of some 40,000 in southwest Oregon next to Interstate 5.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Italy on alert amid anarchist network attacks
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/italy-alert-amid-anarchist-attacks-diplomatic-missions-96789640">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/italy-alert-amid-anarchist-attacks-diplomatic-missions-96789640</a>

GIST	<p>MILAN -- Italy's government has increased security at its diplomatic missions around the globe in response to “a crescendo of terroristic attacks” by an informal anarchist network acting in solidarity with an imprisoned Italian militant, the foreign minister said Tuesday.</p> <p>Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani cited nearly a dozen attacks since the end of November, ranging from vandalism to explosive devices that have caused damage to Italian diplomatic targets in Argentina, Bolivia, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland. No injuries have been reported.</p> <p>“It is obvious that there is an international solidarity (among anarchists) and therefore an attack against Italy, against Italian institutions, is being carried out across the world,” Tajani said, adding that security was being raised at all Italian embassies and consulates as well as the foreign ministry.</p> <p>Tajani said they believe the network includes both Italians and anarchists from other countries acting in concert. He referred to graffiti scrawled in Catalan on the building housing the Italian Consulate in Barcelona.</p> <p>The most serious of the attacks was the firebombing of two cars at the residence of an Italian diplomat in Athens in early December — one car was torched, and Tajani said only the failure of the second bomb targeting a car inside the garage of the residence and near a gas line averted worse consequences.</p> <p>The attacks and as well as a series of protests, including one planned Tuesday in Madrid, are in solidarity with Alfredo Cospito, who has been on a hunger strike since October to protest a strict prison regime reserved for terrorists and mafiosi. The 55-year-old militant is serving a 10-year sentence for shooting in the leg an energy executive for a state-controlled company and 20 years for a series of dynamite attacks in Italy.</p> <p>An appeals court in Turin last spring toughened his prison conditions to include solitary confinement except for one hour a day and a strict limit of family visits. The regime is imposed on prisoners who are considered to pose a danger even from inside prison.</p> <p>Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said that the fact of the attacks only reinforces the necessity of the regime in Cospito’s case.</p> <p>Cospito’s lawyers are currently appealing the strict conditions.</p> <p>In the meantime, Cospito has been transferred from Sardinia to a prison south of Milan, which Justice Minister Carlo Nordio said was best equipped to deal with the health challenges of the hunger strike.</p> <p>In Italy, anarchists on Monday torched cars belonging to the TIM telecommunications company, scrawling slogans denouncing Cospito's treatment nearby. This weekend, a small group of his supporters clashed with police in Rome and two incendiary devices were lobbed in the parking lot of a police station in the capital. No one was injured.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Report: Saudi use of death penalty up 82%</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/report-saudi-death-penalty-doubled-rule-mohammed-bin/story?id=96785686">https://abcnews.go.com/International/report-saudi-death-penalty-doubled-rule-mohammed-bin/story?id=96785686</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON -- The use of the death penalty under the rule of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his father, King Salman, has almost doubled annually since they rose to power, according to a new report seen by ABC News.</p> <p>The report, published on Tuesday by the non-profit European Saudi organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) and the anti-death penalty charity Reprieve, titled “Bloodshed and Lies: Mohammed bin Salman’s Kingdom of Executions,” says that the average number of executions has risen 82% under their rule, even as the country has projected a modernizing image to the outside world.</p>

The number of executions annually has risen from an average of 70.8 between 2010-2014, to 129.5 per year since 2015, when the current king and crown prince came to power. Despite official claims that the death penalty does not apply to minors, at least 15 child defendants have been executed in the Kingdom since 2010, according to the data published by the human rights groups. Over 1,000 executions have been carried out in Saudi Arabia since 2015, the report said.

The report also looked into the increasing use of mass executions, such as the record number of 81 people [executed on a single day in March](#) of last year on a range of charges, including terrorism. The UN's High Commissioner Human Rights groups [condemned](#) the mass execution, saying that the regime had implemented "an extremely broad definition" of terrorism that includes non-violent acts.

"The explosion in the number of executions in Saudi Arabia under Mohammed bin Salman is a crisis the international community cannot continue to ignore," Reprieve Director Maya Foya shared in a statement. "Every data point in this report is a human life taken ... And all while MBS lies to the world that he has reformed the system to reduce the number of people executed. When the US, UK and EU go along with these lies, it makes the next mass execution more likely."

Human rights groups have long expressed concerns that the kingdom's human rights record has been overlooked by the international community in [favor of geopolitical and economic interests](#). The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment.

However, the BBC [received](#) a statement from the Saudi Embassy in London in response to an investigation into the death penalty, which said other countries around the world use the death penalty at their own discretion.

"As we respect their right to determine their own laws and customs, we hope that others will respect our sovereign right to follow our own judicial and legislative choices," the statement said.

The judicial system that convicts defendants for capital crimes is shrouded in secrecy, according to the report, with the government often not notifying the defendants' families and returning their bodies.

"This report provides a glimpse at what Saudi justice looks like now that MBS has been emboldened by Western governments that have failed to hold him accountable for the killing of Saudi dissident and journalist Jamal Khashoggi, as well as numerous other crimes and abuses including Yemen war," Abdullah al Oudah, whose father currently faces a death sentence, said in a statement shared with ABC News. "My father is possibly facing the death penalty any moment just because he called for peace and tweeted for reforms."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Omaha: active shooter killed in Target store</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-firing-ar-15-style-rifle-inside-omaha/story?id=96805623">https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-firing-ar-15-style-rifle-inside-omaha/story?id=96805623</a>
GIST	<p>A man armed with an AR-15-style rifle was shot and killed by police after opening fire in a Target store in Nebraska, authorities said.</p> <p>No injuries were reported among employees and shoppers at the Omaha store, police said.</p> <p>Law enforcement officers responded to multiple reports of an active shooter at the west Omaha Target around noon local time on Tuesday, the Omaha Police Department said.</p> <p>"The first arriving officers went into the building, confronted the suspect and shot him dead," Omaha Police Chief Todd Schmaderer told reporters during a press briefing Tuesday.</p> <p>The suspect, who was described as a white man estimated to be in his 30s, was pronounced dead at the scene.</p>

	<p>Schmaderer said the man entered the store armed with the gun and "plenty of ammunition" and began firing rounds. Police received more than two dozen 911 calls for an active shooter at the store, and multiple shell casings were found at the scene, police said.</p> <p>The suspect had 13 loaded magazines, according to the police department.</p> <p>It is unknown at this time if the suspect was firing at anybody, Schmaderer said.</p> <p>No civilian injuries were reported after police conducted several sweeps of the store, Schmaderer said. A Target spokesperson also confirmed in a statement that all guests and workers had "safely evacuated the store."</p> <p>Omaha police thanked "brave" Target employees who recently underwent active shooter training and "assisted in getting shoppers out of the store."</p> <p>The store will be closed until further notice, the Target spokesperson said.</p> <p>"We are partnering with the Omaha PD as we learn more," the spokesperson said.</p>
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